

CITY OF BELLEVUE
BELLEVUE PLANNING COMMISSION
MINUTES

April 9, 2025
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chair Goepple, Commissioners Bhargava, Ferris, Khanloo, Lu, Villaveces

COMMISSIONERS REMOTE: None

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: None

STAFF PRESENT: Kate Nesse, Thara Johnson, Teun Deuling, Brooke Brod, Community Development Department; Nick Whipple, Kirsten Mandt, Development Services Department; Matt McFarland, Robert Sepler, City Attorney's Office

COUNCIL LIAISON: Deputy Mayor Malakoutian

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 Goepple who presided.

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

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioner Bhargava who arrived at 6:32 p.m.

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

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

4. REPORTS OF CITY COUNCIL, BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS
(6:32 p.m.)

Deputy Mayor Malakoutian announced that Councilmember Stokes had resigned from the after serving for 14 years, and that Vice Chair Cálad had resigned from the Commission. Both brought valuable perspectives to the table and both will be missed.

Deputy Mayor Malakoutian reported that the Council acted to reappoint Commissioner Villaveces to another four years on the Commission.

On behalf of the Commission, Chair Goepple said Vice Chair Cálad's voice will be missed. Vice Chair Cálad put in a lot of hard work and was compassionate about the issues facing the city.

5. STAFF REPORTS
(6:36 p.m.)

A. Planning Commission Meeting Schedule

Dr. Kate Nesse took a few minutes to review the Commission's schedule of upcoming meeting dates and agenda items.

B. Written Communication Procedure

Dr. Kate Nesse addressed the procedures for distributing written communications sent to the Planning Commission. Potential methods for sharing the communications were outlined, including batching emails for distribution on the meeting day, sharing emails individually upon receipt, or creating multiple batches throughout the week leading up to each meeting.

Commissioner Khanloo voiced a preference for receiving all emails in one batch, but said two batches would also be okay.

Commissioner Ferris also noted a preference for receiving the emails individuals as they are received.

Commissioner Villaveces indicated a preference for the batch approach, as did Commissioners Lu and Bhargava. Chair Goepple also preferred the batch approach.

Dr. Kate Nesse explained that most comments come in over the weekend or the day of a meeting. Comments and PowerPoint presentations are forwarded to the Commissioners between noon and 2:00 p.m. the day of each meeting.

The consensus favored a balanced approach of receiving two batches, one on the Friday preceding a meeting and the day of the meeting.

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

Chair Goepple 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.

A. Written Communications
(6:45 p.m.)

Dr. Kate Nesse summarized the written communications received, noting that eight additional emails regarding the middle housing proposal had arrived after the morning cutoff. Some of the emails included requests urging the Commission not to exceed the legislative requirements, while others urged the Commission to adopt the model code. Additional emails asked the Commission to consider potential impacts on automobile traffic, retain certain footnotes within the land use code. Some expressed general support for the proposed amendments.

B. Oral Communications
(6:47 p.m.)

Heidi Dean expressed concerns about the neighborhood area planning process for Newport, noting difficulties related to communication, including incorrect links meant for Crossroads instead of Newport, insufficient notification times for neighborhood activities, and input collected from participants who reside outside the Newport subarea. Frustration was expressed that the neighborhood planning processes seemed overshadowed by larger planning initiatives such as the middle housing and Housing Options, Middle and Affordable Housing (HOMA) amendments. The situation has left residents feeling sidelined, with limited influence restricted to superficial aspects like street trees rather than substantive decisions related to land use and neighborhood vision. The Commissioners were asked to fully review the email forwarded to them in order to fully understand the concerns.

Martin Seelig noted being a longtime Bellevue resident and local property owner and addressed the parking requirements for multifamily housing, saying the parking requirements should be reduced to one space per residential unit, or even fewer, especially for affordable housing projects. There are high costs and inefficiencies associated with mandated parking spaces, including increased costs related to construction, maintenance, and required infrastructure like electric vehicle charging stations. Athletic fields, gardens and social gathering spaces are uses that could be created in the absence of more parking. Bellevue should follow the precedents set by cities such as Seattle and Portland, which have reduced or eliminated parking requirements near transit-rich areas. The city should embrace improved public transit options and reduce dependency on private automobile parking to facilitate affordable housing development.

Lisa Sferra's family owns a 9.23-acre horse pasture that has no structures on it located in North Bellevue. The site barely falls within the half-mile walkshed area defined by the proposed middle housing Land Use Code amendment. A recent personal test demonstrated being able to reach one of the nearest transit stops in approximately 11 minutes. Given that evidence, the Commission should consider including similar large single parcels within the area allowing increased housing density, specifically six units per lot, if any portion of the property intersects the walk shed boundary. There is a need for more affordable housing. The younger generation, many of whom do not own a car and prefer to commute by foot or transit, values housing affordability. The Commissioners were encouraged to personally experience the area's beauty and tranquility, and to see its desirability for future housing.

Army Olson, who has professional experience in multifamily housing construction, argued that the proposed fee in-lieu of \$150,000 per lot with additional density is essentially a tax on housing that could discourage developers. Using a hypothetical scenario based on the site highlighted by the previous speaker, it was illustrated that the cost associated with the fee could eliminate roughly 30 percent of a developer's potential profit. The financial barrier might deter builders from pursuing additional density, thus hindering Bellevue's goal of creating 35,000 new housing units. Allowing smaller lots, enabled by higher density, would naturally lower home prices and support first-time homebuyers. Fostering homeownership would benefit the

community overall, as owners typically maintain properties better than renters. The Commissioners were urged to reconsider the high fee which would negatively impact housing availability and affordability.

Alex Tsimerman began with a Nazi salute and called the Commissioners dirty damn Nazi fascist banditos and quickly deviated from the relevant topics, making inflammatory remarks directed toward Mayor Robinson and Bellevue's government, accusing them of corruption and comparing their behavior to Nazi practices.

Chair Goepple asked the record to reflect that Tsimerman's testimony was another violation of city Ordinance 6752, which restricts public comments to matters within the Commission's jurisdiction and prohibits disruptive conduct. Tsimerman was repeatedly instructed to cease interrupting. Ultimately Tsimerman was removed from the meeting due to disruptive and inappropriate behavior, and clarified that the comments made violated the ordinance, were unrelated to the Planning Commission's duties, and did not represent the city's values. Tsimerman's intolerant and racist language were particularly condemned.

7. PUBLIC HEARING (7:07 p.m.)

A. Middle Housing Land Use Code Amendment (LUCA) to Implement House Bills HB-1110 and HB-1337

Chair Geppel outlined the procedural guidelines and called for a motion to open the public hearing.

A motion to open the public hearing was made by Commissioner Ferris. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Villaveces and the motion carried unanimously.

Assistant Director Nick Whipple summarized the background and extensive community engagement process associated with the Middle Housing LUCA, and explained that the public hearing followed earlier study sessions held in October, February, and March that emphasized the Commission's intent to gather substantial public input. Following the public testimony, the Commission can elect either to make a recommendation or further deliberate at a subsequent meeting scheduled for April 23.

Nick Whipple provided a thorough overview of the public engagement process, highlighting its multi-year nature and the proactive outreach efforts used to involve a broad range of community members. The initial outreach phase was tied to the Comprehensive Plan update process, and Phase 2 focused on affirming the city's vision, exploring livability, assessing growth options, and refining the recommendations. Phase three involved 52 community representatives in strategy teams, accompanied by a statistically valid survey of approximately 1100 residents, demonstrating broad community support for proposed growth strategies. Phase 4 was targeted specifically at addressing middle housing; it employed a survey that enjoyed 567 respondents, 90 percent of whom were Bellevue residents. Underscored were the efforts made by city staff to host information sessions both virtually and in person at diverse venues and times to maximize participation. Staff also provided interactive mapping tools and other visual aids to ensure transparency and clarity regarding the proposed density changes.

Code and Policy Senior Planner Kirsten Mandt detailed specific aspects of the density proposal, explaining that the baseline density requirement applies citywide. As mandated by HB-1110,

four units per lot are allowed by right. The city's proposal aligns with that standard. Accessory dwelling units (ADUs) are recommended not to count towards the density, which is in line with the state model code guidelines. Additionally, six units per lot would be allowed citywide if two of the units are affordable housing, with a fee in-lieu option in lieu of providing the two affordable units.

With regard to the proposed fee-in-lieu option, the proposal offers a flexible range from \$75,000 to \$150,000 per unit. The highest fee could adequately subsidize affordability but might reduce developer participation due to higher costs. Conversely, the lowest fee would likely encourage greater participation but generate less affordable housing funding per unit. A middle-ground fee of \$100,000 was also suggested as a compromise solution.

With regard to the density requirements related to major transit areas, Kirsten Mandt emphasized the state guidance requiring six units per lot within a quarter-mile radius of major transit stops. The city, however, has proposed expanding the requirement to a half-mile radius to align with the state recommendations. Additionally, the proposal includes allowing six units per lot within a quarter-mile radius of frequent transit services, defined as routes with at least four stops per hour at least twelve hours per day.

The proposal calls for permitting six units per lot within a quarter-mile radius of a neighborhood center or a regional or countywide growth center in order to leverage existing transit infrastructure and urban amenities.

The Commissioners were shown a walk shed map with the boundaries adjusted to account for natural barriers such as highways or greenbelts, emphasizing realistic pedestrian access. It was stated that compliance with the walk shed criteria would need to be verified during the permitting process using tools such as Google Maps.

Nick Whipple said the city must respond to another mandate handed down by the state that relates to implementing co-living housing, which is described as residential units containing individual, lockable rooms rented separately, with shared common spaces such as kitchens. According to the state statute, wherever the city permits six units per lot by right, co-living housing must also be allowed by right. Under the bill, parking is required for co-living housing, with each individual unit counted as 0.25 of a unit, thus a co-living structure with four units would require one parking space. The co-living housing component has not yet been launched by the City Council. It will have an impact on where six units will be allowed by right.

Turning to the topic of floor area ratio (FAR), Kirsten Mandt noted that feedback had been received regarding smaller lot sizes. Staff recommended slightly increasing allowable FAR for lots ranging from 4700 to 8400 square feet to enhance the feasibility of middle housing development. Accessory dwelling units (ADUs) would continue to be excluded from the FAR calculation, as well as a garage space of 250 square feet to improve marketability. For lots larger than 10,000 square feet, staff proposed maintaining the established FAR calculation of 0.5 for the initial 10,000 square feet and 0.3 thereafter.

Kirsten Mandt explained that the setback standards were adjusted, with the front setbacks reduced slightly compared to current codes but not as significantly as proposed by the state's model ordinance for all land use districts. Similarly, the lot coverage limits were moderately increased by 5 percent across all residential zones, with an additional 5 percent specifically allocated to cottage housing developments due to their unique design requirements involving smaller, clustered units, more pathways, and additional open spaces.

Regarding the parking requirements, the proposal maintained the previously discussed standard of one parking space per unit citywide for developments consisting of two or more units. Additionally, the proposal retains the existing parking requirement exemptions within a half-mile radius of major transit stops, and continues to exempt ADUs under 1000 square feet from parking minimums.

The building height standards remain consistent with previous discussions. The proposed height limit in the proposal is uniformly set at 38 feet, which differs slightly from the state's suggested model code, which proposes 35 feet generally or 40 feet for pitched roofs. For ADUs, the proposed maximum heights are 24 feet or 28 feet if constructed above a detached structure, which aligns with state law prohibiting maximum height limits below 24 feet for ADUs.

For cottage and courtyard housing sites, the proposal includes adjustments based on community input, notably a reduction in the required open space width from 20 feet down to 15 feet to improve site usability. The overall density for those types of developments would be determined based on FAR rather than specific dwelling unit counts, simplifying compliance. Additionally, a 250-square-foot exemption for garages was incorporated for cottages.

The ADU regulations remain consistent with the state-mandated provisions allowing two ADUs per lot. They retain the size flexibility for attached ADUs, and provide parking exemptions within a half-mile of major transit stops, as required by HB-1337.

Kirsten Mandt said there were adjustments and clarifications made to the tree code section aimed at easing implementation and addressing challenges encountered by smaller-scale projects. The changes included clarifying the definition of "development activity" to avoid unnecessary burdens on minor homeowner improvements. Also clarified was how to handle fractions when calculating the tree credit requirements. Language was added to address how to handle significant trees on property lines, and tree protection covenants. Also added was some language creating alternative planting guidelines based on input from arborists. Also proposed were specific tree credit reductions for cottage housing in acknowledgment of the complexities involved in site design and accommodating necessary pathways and open spaces.

Additional miscellaneous changes were outlined, including permitting unit lot subdivisions to facilitate fee-simple ownership across all middle housing types and ADUs removing minimum lot sizes in multifamily land use districts to better align the multifamily land use district regulations with middle housing. The proposal also adapts the landscape transition requirements from the Transition Area Design District into broader citywide code standards to streamline implementation.

Kirsten Mandt stressed that the decision criteria call for consistency with the Comprehensive Plan, enhancing the public health, safety, or welfare, and aligning with the best interests of Bellevue's residents and property owners.

Chair Goepple opened the floor for testimony from the public.

Cameron Kast expressed strong support for the proposed Middle Housing Land Use Code Amendment and advocated for exceeding the state-required minimums. Kast emphasized personal experience with Bellevue's high housing costs and described how challenging it was to find affordable housing upon moving to Bellevue for employment. Housing was ultimately secured in a fourplex development, which is a clear example of successful middle housing that

replaced previous single-family structures. The value of having diverse housing options was stressed and the speaker specifically endorsed measures such as permitting six or more housing units by right near neighborhood centers and areas with frequent transit. Also recommended was increasing the allowable floor area ratio, reducing setbacks, permitting higher building heights, expanding accessory dwelling units to 1,200 square feet, and lowering or eliminating the parking minimums wherever practical. Cities nationwide have successfully implemented similar middle housing policies, which has significantly strengthen their economic resilience and community diversity.

Anne Rittenhouse opposed the proposed LUCA, citing direct conflicts with the Comprehensive Plan which has a stated goal of accommodating 35,000 new housing units by 2044. That should be the goal of the LUCA but no more. The proposal neglects neighborhood distinctiveness by imposing uniform citywide changes without considering unique neighborhood characteristics. Specifically referencing the community of Newport Hills where there are few sidewalks and bike paths, it was stated that the proposal to severely restrict off-street parking will have a very negative impact on the safety of residents. HB-1110 specifically allows the city to submit an empirical study to show that on-street parking will be less safe for pedestrians and bicyclists, yet there is no mention of that anywhere in the staff report. The proposal does quite the opposite of supporting the health and vitality of neighborhoods by proposing that density and building heights be increased while reducing setbacks, tree retention, and open space. The LUCA undermines Bellevue's principle of maintaining orderly, community-aligned development. The Commission was urged to adopt the minimum state-required density increases and maximum neighborhood protections. The current draft selectively represents state law provisions to justify aggressive densification.

Chloe Chen spoke representing the Somerset Community Association and raised concerns specific to the Somerset neighborhood. A poll of 1500 homes was conducted regarding the proposed middle housing changes. Somerset is bound by covenants that restrict the area to single-family homes only. The area has views of the lake, the mountains, and the city skyline. Under the proposal, that all would change given that areas surrounding Somerset could increase their building heights to 38 feet for middle housing; Somerset homes are limited to 30 feet for flat roofs, and the change will potentially obstruct the valuable views. The city should consider introducing or adjusting zoning regulations, such as a new or revised single-family residential district, possibly like SR 3.5, to ensure consistent height restrictions for multifamily developments adjacent to single-family neighborhoods, thus preserving community aesthetics and views.

Bob Steed, a former Planning Commissioner and chair of the Somerset Community Association, further emphasized some practical considerations. The routes that qualify for increased density under the proposed LUCA should be required to be Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant in order to align with Bellevue's significant investment in ADA infrastructure. Where covenants exist, building permit applications should include verification from homeowners associations confirming compliance with existing community covenants, and verification that the existing infrastructure can accommodate additional density, which proper access for emergency responses. The importance of ensuring adequate infrastructure capacity and emergency access prior to approving increased density was stressed. The proposed \$150,000 fee-in-lieu for affordable units should be indexed to inflation metrics like the Consumer Price Index (CPI).

Anne Coughlin, a long-time Bellevue resident from Northeast Bellevue, expressed concerns about the proposed LUCA exceeding the intended scope of the state mandates. It was argued that allowing up to six units per lot and permitting co-housing developments introduces densities and

building forms incompatible with established neighborhood character, potentially generating social friction and parking issues. Apartment buildings with six units will not conform to or blend in with the neighborhood character. Co-housing developments are likely to be sources of additional difficulties, depending on the population. There are practical benefits associated with single-family rambler-style homes in that they support aging-in-place and are conducive to multigenerational living. A concern was also raised regarding property tax increases due to potential rezones for higher densities. It was suggested the result could be additional burdens on existing homeowners.

Jazmine Smith spoke representing the Eastside Housing Roundtable and Futurewise and voiced strong support for the proposed LUCA, praising Bellevue's proactive approach to creating diverse and affordable housing opportunities across the city. The proposed LUCA is an essential strategy for providing flexible housing choices at varying income levels, effectively closing opportunity gaps and meeting residents' evolving needs throughout different life stages. The staff were applauded for their extensive outreach and public engagement, and acknowledged their efforts to facilitate successful implementation of the middle housing policy.

Heidi Dean voiced significant concerns regarding HB-1110 and HB-1337, characterizing them as ill-advised and based on failed policies from other regions, including Vancouver, British Columbia. Although acknowledging the necessity of compliance due to the state mandates, the Commission was urged not to exceed the state requirements. Several reasons for caution were highlighted, including that Bellevue could achieve its goal of 35,000 new housing units by 2044 without expanding the mandate. Increased density will not solve affordability problems. Concerns were raised about the potential impacts of HB-1096 which could permit lot splitting and further exacerbate the negative impacts. Allowing for density increases will raise property values, subsequently increasing property taxes and creating a financial burden, equating to an unfair governmental taking. There are significant infrastructure limitations, particularly in Newport Hills, where there are outdated asbestos concrete water pipes similar to those involved in previous bursting incidents in Somerset, narrow roads, insufficient sidewalks, and limited capacity for increased traffic. Increasing density might disrupt community cohesion, allowing neighborhood properties to become predominantly investor-driven. It is also concerning that the city never notified the Newport Hills Community Club about the proposed middle housing LUCA.

Kari Marino, a resident of the Surry Downs neighborhood for 34 years, said the way Bellevue has evolved over the years into a major business hub is good. There is a clear need for affordable housing and a mandate to support the two House Bills, but in doing so the Commission should carefully consider all aspects when implementing the middle housing amendments. The character of the existing neighborhoods should be maintained. Increased density through condominium development or subdivisions on small residential lots in established neighborhoods should not be allowed as that would negatively affect the character and safety of the community. The speaker highlighted issues related to off-street parking and pedestrian safety, noting that adding more street parking will exacerbate hazards for residents walking, cycling, or engaging in daily neighborhood activities. Off-street parking should be required to the extent feasible. The Commission was strongly urged to protect Bellevue's established tree policies and neighborhood aesthetics, and to advocate for organic and homeowner-driven growth, especially through Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) rather than through corporate-driven housing developments. Affordable housing needs to be accommodated naturally within existing neighborhoods. The newly raised potential of introducing co-living housing into single-family residential neighborhoods is very concerning.

Ed Wang offered a supportive perspective on the Middle Housing Land Use Code Amendment. Housing affordability triggered by rising home costs has forced many to relocate outside Bellevue despite their wanting to remain part of the community. Despite having relocated, those families and individuals continue to regularly come to Bellevue to work and shop and thus they utilize Bellevue's roads, services and amenities, thus contributing to infrastructure demands indirectly. Strong support was voiced for the increased density proposals, specifically the increased floor area ratios to allow more family-sized units, higher densities near transit and neighborhood centers, flexible regulations around ADUs, and reduced parking requirements. There is an urgent need for increased housing options across Bellevue to accommodate diverse income levels and life stages.

Paul Clark, testifying in a personal capacity and not as a member of the Parks and Community Services Board, urged caution regarding the scope of the city's middle housing proposal. While it is acknowledged that the city must comply with the state legislation, the current proposal exceeds the state mandates and is unnecessarily aggressive, potentially causing unintended negative consequences. Careful infrastructure planning and improvements are needed to ensure neighborhoods are adequately prepared for increased density. Specifically highlighted were concerns about transportation, water, sewer, and electricity infrastructure. The Commission should call for enhanced transparency and proactive communication on the part of the city, including through direct outreach to homeowner associations and neighborhood groups to ensure awareness and understanding of the proposed changes. The precedence of homeowner covenants (CC&Rs) over the proposed zoning changes needs to be clarified in order to avoid confusion. The speaker urged the Commission to take a balanced approach, adhering strictly to the state requirements rather than introducing excessive and inadequately planned density increases that could negatively affect residents' investments and quality of life.

David Cagle strongly opposed the current form of the middle housing amendments, characterizing them as radical rather than modest changes, and expressed significant concerns over their potential impacts. The Commissioners were urged to visit the Wilburton neighborhood any weeknight between 3:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. and observe the existing challenges, including the narrow streets that lack sidewalks, the existing traffic congestion, and the safety issues. The Commissioners were urged to consider how additional density, reduced setbacks, increased street parking, and limited infrastructure investments could exacerbate conditions, creating hazardous conditions reminiscent of densely developed areas such as Capitol Hill in Seattle. The Commissioners were challenged to reflect on their representation responsibilities and question whether their allegiance lay primarily with current residents or prospective future residents seeking entry into Bellevue. It appears the staff along with others have made the interests of the two groups irreconcilable. The Commission was urged to instruct staff to limit the proposed changes strictly to those required by state law, thereby protecting existing neighborhoods from excessive, disruptive developments.

Warren Halverson, a long-time Bridle Trails resident, emphasized having deep community ties and experience serving on the city's Human Services Commission representing the citizens of Bellevue. Significant concern was voiced in regard to the proposed land use actions and their potential impacts on neighborhood character. The Commission should pause its current approach and thoroughly reassess the proposals, underscoring the fact that existing plans to add Accessory Dwelling Units, Detached Accessory Dwelling Units, duplexes, and other housing types has progressed rapidly without adequate community involvement or careful consideration of the consequences. The wisdom of exceeding the density requirements outlined by state House Bills 1110 and 1337 is questionable. Such permanent zoning changes should not rely excessively on forecasts, the accuracy of which should be viewed skeptically. There are uncertainties like traffic

management, commercial vacancy rates, remote work trends, and the unpredictable impact of artificial intelligence on housing needs. The Commissioners were thanked for their dedication, but were urged to exercise caution and thoughtful deliberation regarding the issues.

Victor Bishop distributed a modesplit chart based on Bellevue's transportation forecast modeling and pointed out that the chart indicates single-car vehicles currently dominate and will continue to dominate Bellevue's transportation landscape through at least 2050. It is nonsense to think that light rail and transit will solve the traffic problem. The projected increases in transit usage going forward remain minimal, with only around 1.5 percent of trips expected to utilize the light rail system by 2035. Approximately 76 percent of trips will continue to rely on automobiles. The Commission was urged to maintain sufficient off-street and on-street parking to prevent severe congestion in neighborhoods and along arterial streets. Bellevue is growing fast but remains a vehicle-dominated city. Historical examples where similar efforts to boost transit usage through increased density around transit stations did not substantially shift commuting patterns. Caution should be emphasized when it comes to making policy decisions based on overly optimistic transit utilization forecasts.

Veronica Shakotko spoke representing the Master Builders Association of King and Snohomish Counties, the largest home-building association in the nation. Bellevue's approach to updating city codes was commended in light of the city's ambitious goal to add 35,000 housing units by 2044. Four critical points from the Association's written feedback were highlighted. First was the importance of aligning various city codes, including transportation, utility, and the tree codes, by permitting multiple curb cuts and reducing setbacks from 200 feet to 20 feet to enhance flexibility in lot clearing. Second was increasing allowed densities from four to nine units within proximity to transit routes and shopping centers, expanding the allowances around the city's B Line and light rail stations. Third was a concern regarding the proposed fee-in-lieu for affordable housing. The suggested rate of \$150,000 per unit could severely slow housing production compared to lower rates in nearby cities like Redmond and Sammamish. Fourth was a recommendation to preserve a floor area ratio of 0.5 for lots over 10,000 square feet, and to give additional FAR bonuses for accessory dwelling units on the larger lots, which will further encourage housing growth.

Anthony Hevia, a Downtown resident, expressed support for the city surpassing the state-mandated minimum housing requirements. The city should allow up to nine housing units per lot near neighborhood centers and frequent transit stops, as previously considered. Housing costs are so high that even those with high wages cannot afford to buy a house in Bellevue. The speaker encouraged increased FAR allowances, reduced setbacks, and greater building flexibility, and emphasized a desire for a more inclusive Bellevue accessible to a broader range of residents, rather than restricting it to only those who can currently afford high housing costs.

Patti Mann, a long-time Bellevue resident, conveyed appreciation for the city's historic planning approach, which effectively balanced development and neighborhood integrity. Concern was voiced regarding the impacts of the state-imposed housing mandates. Hopefully Bellevue's distinctive neighborhood character will still be preserved despite the inevitable changes. Home ownership is a struggle, and now even more so given the rising housing costs and taxes. The Commission was urged to carefully consider the voices of residents who have contributed substantially to Bellevue's identity, and to emphasize that planning decisions should prioritize community concerns and long-term quality of life.

Sridhar Reddy expressed concern regarding the proposed middle housing regulations, particularly as they relate to the FAR for two-home developments. Under the current proposal,

the FAR for an 8000-square-foot lot is 0.5 regardless whether one or two homes are built. That means the total allowable square footage is 4000, and there is no real incentive to build two homes, which undermines the intended purpose of gently increasing neighborhood density without substantially altering community character. It was suggested the FAR guidelines should be revised to incentivize building two units instead of just one. Redmond's absence of FAR restrictions is an example of allowing for greater design flexibility.

Todd Woosley, a long-time Bellevue resident from the Enatai neighborhood, expressed appreciation for the Commission's ongoing efforts to address housing supply issues. Drawing on extensive experience in housing development and advocating for housing affordability, the Commission was asked to retain an existing provision in the floor area ratio rules. It was explained that the aging condition of the speaker's house necessitates replacement, but the current draft regulations would prevent building a planned third floor. Retaining the existing FAR exemption would provide multiple benefits: it would enable better-designed houses featuring setbacks that create a visually appealing "wedding cake" effect, thus offering more daylight and privacy to neighboring properties; and the designs would be more affordable due to reduced foundation and roof sizes, provide increased housing capacity by accommodating multigenerational living, including a ground-floor suite for elderly family members, and maintain community aesthetics. The Commissioners were urged to preserve the FAR exemption that facilitated improved housing design and affordability.

Jessie Clawson focusing specifically on the unit lot subdivision process and explained that the process allows property owners to divide their land into smaller parcels for fee-simple homeownership, thus helping residents build personal wealth. Currently, the regulations as drafted excludes single-family homes from the unit lot subdivision process for single family typologies. Last year, the average short plat process in the city took 61 weeks to gain approval. That is one of the main reasons why lots larger than 10,000 square feet are not being divided to allow for more single family homes. That contrasts with Seattle, where the unit lot subdivision method expedites approvals significantly, even for single-family properties. Adopting similar subdivision rules for single-family developments in Bellevue would streamline approvals, enhance housing availability, increase homeownership opportunities, and preserve neighborhood character through "gentle density" increases. The Commission was strongly urged to advocate for revising Bellevue's code to allow single-family unit lot subdivisions as a straightforward solution to encourage sensible residential growth.

Valentina Vaneeva said Bellevue is becoming increasingly unaffordable, especially for young families, even for households with one partner employed in the technology sector. Most young couples known by the speaker have relocated to more affordable communities because they are unable to afford Bellevue's housing and associated living costs, including childcare. Increased housing density is essential for supporting robust transit systems, thereby reducing commuting burdens and overall living expenses. Without such density, transit improvements will not be economically sustainable, and that will exacerbate the housing and commuting problems. The Commission was urged to expand allowable residential density citywide. Restricting density to limited areas will only perpetuate high housing costs. The proximity to transit requirements should not be made too restrictive. Without meaningful changes, Bellevue risks becoming a city exclusively for high-income residents, and younger families essential to its future vitality will be lost.

Mike Nykreim, a resident of Newport Hills, said the Growth Management Act does not call for stopping sprawl, it only calls for reducing the inappropriate conversion of sprawling developments. The 1991 promise that the Urban Growth Boundary would be moved to

accommodate growth never happened. Instead, there has been a quadruple densification of the neighborhoods, which is contrary to the GMA's original mandate. The GMA also calls for preserving the existing housing stock, something that does not appear in the proposed policy approach. The staff charts to date have not raised the issue of restrictive covenants, CC&Rs, present in many Bellevue neighborhoods, and it is concerning that the restrictions have not been adequately addressed in the current planning process. The Commission and the city attorneys were encouraged to thoroughly investigate and publicly disclose how the covenants might affect the proposed housing developments. The speaker strongly recommended focusing growth within the defined urban growth boundaries rather than disrupting established neighborhoods, and advocated for responsible, sustainable expansion with better infrastructure support.

Michelle Wanamaker, an Eastgate resident, noted having conducted an investigation into the use of fee-in-lieu practices for affordable housing in the Spring District. It was noted that in 2017 the developer Wright Runstad was permitted to opt out of building affordable units by instead paying a fee. Through Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests, documentation was obtained that outlined how much the developer had paid and how many affordable units had been delivered. The Affordable Housing Technical Advisory Group (TAG), which developed Bellevue's affordable housing strategy, had earlier estimated the cost of constructing one affordable housing unit at between \$300,000 and \$350,000. That was eight years ago and obviously those figures are likely outdated. Zero affordable housing units were built in the Spring District. In all cases, the developer chose to pay the fee rather than to build affordable units. As of August 2023, the developer had constructed 792 market-rate units in the Spring District, and the fee-in-lieu payments funded the equivalent of only 4.2 affordable units. The speaker argued that allowing a fee-in-lieu option under the proposed LUCA will result in most if not all developers choosing the fee in-lieu option over constructing affordable units, especially at the proposed amount of only \$150,000, which is substantially below the cost of actual construction and thus highly favorable to developers. Housing built directly by government entities costs approximately 80 percent more than housing constructed by private developers. Therefore, relying on government agencies to build housing with collected fees would significantly reduce efficiency and effectiveness. If a fee-in-lieu option must be included, the amount should reflect real construction costs and include mechanisms for periodic adjustment. The speaker strongly opposed any LUCA requirements that would exceed the baseline mandates outlined in House Bills 1110 and 1337.

Nicole Myers asked the Commission to use a plain English definition of "walking distance" in city codes rather than a technical or radius-based definition. The proposed definitions are confusing residents. More extensive engagement via the city's "Engaging Bellevue" platform could have significantly increased public participation in recent surveys. The speaker offered some hypothetical layouts for development on a 10,000 square foot lot under the proposed LUCA conditions and said the most likely scenario would be six 2900 square foot homes, with each potentially reaching four stories with bonus allowances. That would create facades as tall as sixty feet in some cases. With regard to the impact of cottage housing, the Commissioners were asked to imagine a situation in which sixteen small units, each 900 square feet and four stories high, could be built with minimal spacing and no required porches. The payment of a \$13,000 fee could exempt the developer from planting or preserving trees. The co-living models in Seattle allow for up to fifty-two units on 5000 square foot lots, with no parking required, particularly when located within a half-mile of transit, as allowed under state law. The Commission was urged to consider whether such high-intensity development aligns with community expectations, and to provide more accurate visual representations of what the developments might resemble in real neighborhoods.

Pamela Johnston, a resident of Bridle Trails and a member of the local community club, emphasized that there is a lack of unified vision between city planners and residents. The suggestion was made to adopt a temporary zoning code that will comply with the state mandates for the short term while allowing more time to develop a long-term solution that aligns with Bellevue's unique needs. In 1920, houses were only about a thousand square feet. By 1960, they averaged 1300 square feet. In 1970 the average rose to 1500 square feet, the size of an ADU the Commission is wanting to allow. It makes no sense to allow ADUs to be that large; they are only supposed to be accessory dwelling units. The important thing will be getting the needed housing and density right, preserving the neighborhoods, the trees, and the city in a park atmosphere. The Planned Unit Developments is a planning tool that can simultaneously promote green space and increased housing. The Comprehensive Plan poll asked residents if they would like to have more townhouses and duplexes, and everyone said yes. Also desired is bicycle infrastructure. There was not necessarily support for high-intensity development on single-family lots. The city must provide thoughtful choices tailored to each neighborhood rather than uniform solutions.

Sue Sander, a longtime Bellevue resident and a professional in environmental sustainability, recounted a personal history of growing up and raising a family in the city. Concern was expressed about increasing density through middle housing on existing residential lots. The city should explore other areas, outside of established neighborhoods, where higher-density development could take place. There is a need to fully evaluate the environmental implications of the proposed LUCA and to question whether environmental reviews have been adequately conducted. In Somerset the homeowners' associations and the CC&Rs would prevent much of the proposed development. Infrastructure issues have not been adequately addressed; additional multifamily housing will require expanded sidewalks, road systems, ADA accommodations, and public utilities such as water mains. In Somerset there is a house that is currently accommodating twenty residents and fourteen vehicles that have overwhelmed the local streets and driveways. What is needed is forward-thinking, master-planned solutions rather than ad hoc development within existing neighborhoods. The Commission was lauded for its efforts in restoring Bellevue's tree canopy regulations, which were recently improved and which need continued support.

Fay Hou, a long-time resident of Newport Hills, recounted an incident involving a neighbor's property which had been purchased by a foreign investor. Although the property included a landmark tree that was designated for protection, the tree was removed. Subsequently, the property was redeveloped with a structure that exceeded the allowable floor area ratio by approximately forty percent, creating a what can now be described as a "great wall." A serious safety incident occurred on November 24 when construction crews installing a water pipeline that crossed the street lifted a live gas line using heavy equipment. The work was performed without any notification to residents. Puget Sound Energy only discovered the gas line damage by chance two weeks later and installed a new pipeline. The city failed to perform proper inspection or enforcement in the case, which is consistent with a broader pattern of inadequate oversight. A concern was expressed that the proposed LUCA, which would increase the number of housing units per lot, will drastically increase the city's inspection workload. The city currently lacks the capacity to manage the existing enforcement demands and additional density will further exacerbate the risks, including potential environmental and safety hazards. The city should act to ban foreign real estate investment, similar to the approach taken by Vancouver, British Columbia, in order to prioritize housing access for local families and prevent further speculative ownership.

Phyllis White praised the fact that Bellevue is a well-planned city that balances infrastructure, environmental assets, and community amenities. The Commission was urged to preserve the

city's unique character, defined by its suburban qualities, access to strong schools, and clean public spaces. Bellevue's green infrastructure and integrated mobility systems are fundamental to the city's identity and economic competitiveness. While recognizing the state's push for middle housing, local growth must align with Bellevue's infrastructure capacity and fiscal limitations. The Commission was cautioned that new development must be compatible with existing neighborhood scale and must include inclusive outreach to affected residents. Increasing density alone will not guarantee affordability, and Seattle was cited as a cautionary example of where housing prices remain high despite greater density. The speed and scale of the proposed changes have been surprising and the Commission was urged to proceed with caution.

A motion to extend the meeting to 10:25 p.m. was made by Commissioner Ferris. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Khanloo and the motion carried unanimously.

****BREAK****

(8:50 p.m. to 8:59 p.m.)

Jeannie Marquardson, a Newport Hills resident, acknowledged Bellevue's historic reliance on car-based infrastructure and expressed concern about the impacts of increased multifamily housing in areas still dependent on personal vehicles. It was said that the existing multifamily housing in the speaker's neighborhood has already resulted in excessive on-street parking, and there are questions around where any additional cars would be accommodated if further density is introduced. While supported a transition away from automobile dependency, such changes will occur gradually. The speaker advocated for implementing only the minimum requirements under state law and suggested that the city could make further adjustments later if necessary. Implementing high-density zoning prematurely will have irreversible impacts on neighborhoods. A cautious approach is needed.

Steve Lawrence spoke on behalf of himself and Lisa Matsui, both residents of Wilburton, brought to the table a broader policy perspective informed by experience serving as a city council member in another jurisdiction. It was emphasized that many land use proposals originate from city and regional staff rather than elected officials, and the staff often act as policy advocates rather than neutral informants. Concern was expressed that the Commission has been receiving a one-sided perspective from staff and urged the Commissioners to listen carefully to the community voices that are offering a counterbalance. Bellevue is a beautiful and unique city, but expansive housing density will over time erode those qualities. Seattle and Portland were cited as examples of cities that have undergone extensive change and where once-stable neighborhoods have become dominated by run-down rentals and large multifamily structures. Implementing higher density across large swaths of Bellevue will lead to a slow decline in neighborhood character. The implementation of sidewalks in redeveloped areas, possibly in a piecemeal fashion, will result in an incomplete infrastructure system. The Commission was urged to uphold the city's Comprehensive Plan, which emphasizes preservation of existing neighborhoods. The Commissioners were called on assert leadership and to instruct staff to prioritize what is best for the city and its residents, rather than yielding to external development pressures. Support was voiced for the idea of limiting foreign investment in real estate. The Commission was urged not to exceed the state's legal requirements, which could be found to be unconstitutional.

Lori Wilke, a long-time Bellevue resident of various Bellevue neighborhoods, provided comments focused on neighborhood preservation and livability. Having resided for the last 27 years in a house near Stevenson Elementary, the speaker described the neighborhood as hidden, diverse, and characterized by large lots, multigenerational households, and some recent additions

of accessory dwelling units. Concern was expressed over the impacts of nearby zoning and construction activity, especially along NE 8th Street and around 128th Avenue NE to 130th Avenue NE, which has caused lane reductions and traffic disruptions. A neighboring 7000 square foot home that took five years to build is viewed as a disruption to neighborhood character. Overwhelming as it is, it would be far worse if developed as five or six townhouses. The speaker emphasized a desire to age in place and maintain the current character and community cohesion of the neighborhood.

Howard Liu, an area resident and planner with over thirty years of experience, including work on significant projects such as the downtown Seattle public library and the Amazon Vulcan campus, advocated for increased middle housing development. The speaker stressed the need for land use efficiency and sustainability. Two specific changes were proposed. First was to allow eight units on double lots and twelve units on triple lots without requiring short plats, in order to preserve existing buildings with architectural value. Second was to permit four-story stacked flats rather than limiting development to three-story buildings. Four-story buildings with horizontal access would be more accessible and comfortable, especially for individuals with mobility issues, and could be built to a similar height as three-story buildings with steep roofs. The speaker emphasized that land use decisions can significantly influence sustainability, particularly by avoiding the demolition of sound existing structures.

Kevin Wallace, a Lakemont neighborhood resident, criticized the outreach and level of transparency associated with the current Land Use Code process, contrasting it unfavorably with the Wilburton process, which was more collaborative and well-structured. It was pointed out that not even the HOA president of the speaker's building was unaware of the current proposals, which should be viewed as a failure of outreach given the limited number of HOAs in the city. The speaker questioned the rationale of applying a quarter-mile density radius around areas like the Lakemont shopping center, which lacks transit service and is not walkable due to physical barriers like fences. What is needed is a case-by-case analysis of zoning areas, collaboration with neighborhood leaders, and consideration of factors such as traffic, parking, utilities, and existing CC&Rs. Support was voiced for the suggestion made by an earlier speaker to map all of the existing CC&Rs and ensure neighborhoods have the resources to enforce them. Neighborhood groups lack the capacity to navigate all of the changes without support from the city.

Tim Hay, a resident of the same home for 61 years, delivered a critique centered on garbage collection logistics and urban design limitations, and said the threat of street parking congestion will kill the neighborhoods. It makes no sense to call for keeping all of the garbage in a garbage room, next to which no one would want to live. Someone would have to be designated to haul everyone's garbage out to the curb, and garbage trucks would have to access private property, likely damaging sidewalks and street trees. One primary use for city alleys is weekly garbage pickup. Citing Seattle's historical development, it was argued that unlike Seattle, Bellevue's suburban structure precludes efficient garbage collection systems for dense developments. Bellevue was built as a suburb without alleys, and that will always stymie high density in the city. Given the very high cost of land in Bellevue, it is doubtful that the city will ever be able to build affordable housing; it will take building either tiny apartments or super cheap units.

Lee White noted having purchased a 15,000 square foot lot in North Seattle in March 2023 for \$700,000 and having invested an additional \$350,000 to permit, subdivide, and prepare it for development. In addition, a \$3.7 million hard money loan was secured, bringing the total investment to approximately \$4.8 million to build 10,400 square feet of housing. That works out to \$461 per square foot. Conversations around middle housing often ignore the actual cost of construction and the profit motives behind such projects. Developers will often buy lots, build

four or five units, and sell them as condominiums at unaffordable prices. In order to turn a profit on the Seattle property the units will need to sell at more than \$700 per square foot. With the current interest rates, a million-dollar unit would require monthly payments of approximately \$7,500, making such housing inaccessible to most residents. There is nothing affordable about middle housing, and it will not be possible for Bellevue to build its way out of its housing problem. Currently some 40 percent of Bellevue's commercial buildings are owned by foreign investors, and some 34 percent of Bellevue's houses are owned by one ethnic group. The investors buy the buildings and rent them out, but not at affordable rates. The rent on a brand new 1000 square foot unit will run between \$3000 and \$4000 per month.

Curtis Reed, a lifelong Bellevue and Cherry Crest resident whose family operates a third-generation construction business, noted living in an older brick rambler home. The city's permitting process and the consequences of mismanaged city planning was criticized. The speaker cited the example of the Vialta development at 130th Avenue NE and NE 20th Street for which the development was approved despite an undersized sewer system, leading to the current nine-month street excavation project that severely disrupted local businesses. Although the property owners received rent concessions from the city, those concessions were not passed on to the tenants. The situation demonstrates the city's failure to consider the downstream impacts of development decisions. Developers often receive low-interest government loans with ten-year holding requirements, but the projects eventually transition into market-rate developments or condominiums, further diminishing housing affordability. The economic pressures driving up costs and rents were not created by the city, rather they were created by the broader economy and state policies.

Betsi Hummer offered a defense of Bellevue's existing diversity in housing types. Every single-family neighborhood in the city is already surrounded by middle housing options such as townhomes, duplexes, apartments, and fourplexes. The city's planning legacy is its housing diversity, even in neighborhoods like Somerset and Lakemont. What is needed is a thoughtful approach to expanding housing options with a focus on compatibility with existing development and transition areas. The current transit system is unreliable and many former bus lines have been discontinued. It was acknowledged that there has been a lot of misinformation in the debate coming from both sides. Middle housing does not equate to middle-income or affordable housing. The earlier remarks made by Kevin Wallace were echoed, particularly the critique that neighborhood associations and homeowners associations were not consulted early in the process. The Commission was urged to include residents at the outset of policy development.

Nick Ton commented that the Commission is facing a decision regarding what the city should look like. There are people who want the city to be better, to progress, and to adapt for the future by welcoming young people and working professionals. The city should take a minute to carefully look at who they are and where they come from. On the other hand are the landed gentry who want nothing to change before they die. They are making noise about the wrong people moving to the city, and everyone knows what they means by "wrong." Bellevue's official tag is that diversity is strength and that the city welcomes the world. Diversity includes age, wealth and occupation. Taking the recommendation of the latter group will mean turning away from the city's pledge. Bellevue should not just be for those who bought in early then kicked out the Japanese and drafted covenants, conditions and restrictions and HOAs to keep out the rest. There is more than just a planning decision at hand: there is a moral decision.

Loretta Lopez, a 35-year Bellevue resident, acknowledged the city's historically successful and intentional planning. Bellevue has previously designated areas of high growth and high density to accommodate various housing types, which has so far worked effectively. House Bills 1110

and 1337 require cities to add more housing while allowing for local flexibility on the understanding that a one-size-fits-all approach is not effective. The Commission was urged to use that flexibility and proceed in phases to avoid unintended consequences. The outcomes of the proposed changes are unpredictable and should be observed incrementally. The city should implement only what is currently required by the state and then evaluate the results before proceeding further. It is concerning that the proposed Land Use Code amendments are difficult to understand, particularly the current forty-eight-page strike draft. There should be more accessible documentation, such as comparison tables to help the public understand what the proposed changes entail. The importance of allowing for public visibility and understanding before final adoption was stressed, not only for housing policies but also for proposed amendments to the tree code. The public is largely unaware of the upcoming changes to the tree code. Staff should provide balanced presentations that include both the benefits and drawbacks of the proposed housing policies.

Lee Sargeant expressed appreciation for Deputy Mayor Malakoutian for representing diverse communities, including Muslim and Iranian populations, and praised the Council's efforts to broaden inclusivity through their work. This speaker said there are environmental consequences associated with increased density, particularly there is an impact on large trees. When large lots are subdivided, additional elements such as sidewalks and impermeable surfaces increase, leaving less space for tree preservation. Development under the current proposal could result in the removal of approximately 40 percent of existing large trees due to spatial constraints and root system disruptions caused by construction equipment. The Commission was encouraged to explore innovative planning approaches that would preserve trees, improve air quality, provide cooling, and protect residents from the effects of climate events such as storms.

A motion to close the public hearing was made by Chair Goepppele. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Villaveces and the motion carried unanimously.

8. STUDY SESSION

A. Great Neighborhoods Program Update on the Neighborhood Area Planning Process for Crossroads and Newport

Planning Director Thara Johnson explained that the initiative is a strategic, community-driven process aimed at developing neighborhood area plans that are aligned with the Comprehensive Plan. The process will also allow for implementing direction from Volume 1 of the Comprehensive Plan. The process was launched by the Council in September 2024.

Senior Planner Teun Deuling said the goal of the process is to enhance Bellevue's sixteen diverse neighborhood areas through tailored area plans. In 2018 the Council launched the Great Neighborhoods Program, and the first neighborhood area plans adopted were for the Northeast Bellevue and Northwest Bellevue neighborhoods. The program was temporarily paused during the broader work to update the Comprehensive Plan, but it has since resumed with an expanded scope based on community feedback, placing greater emphasis on public spaces and urban design.

Teun Deuling said there are four phases to the neighborhood area planning process. The first phase is focused on relationship-building and identifying neighborhood priorities. The second phase involves developing draft strategies with input from the community. The third phase, which began in April and will run through June, centers on refining those strategies and revising draft plans. The final phase, scheduled for July through the fall, will involve study sessions with

the Planning Commission, public hearings, and formal recommendations to the City Council.

There are four core areas to each neighborhood plan: urban design, neighborhood identity, the public realm, and neighborhood connectivity. The elements are intended to reinforce the unique character of each neighborhood and strengthen the function and appeal of public spaces. Although land use was initially considered a potential component of the neighborhood plans, it was clear that any land use changes had to be initiated by property owners before a designated deadline in late December. Since no such proposals were submitted, land use is not part of the current neighborhood planning process.

Community Engagement Lead Brooke Brod said the community engagement plans are centered on inclusivity and representation, and on ensuring that engagement reflects the demographics of each neighborhood. The work has included involvement by cultural outreach assistants who maintain strong ties with local communities, speak relevant languages, and design culturally appropriate outreach efforts. The specific targeted engagement activities included outreach to property managers, school PTAs, principals and teachers to build direct relationships and increase visibility in the community. Engagement methods were varied and accessible, offering in-person events, online platforms, and outreach at different times and locations. Relationship-building began early with key individuals such as neighborhood leaders, members of condominium boards, and participants in local civic programs like Bellevue Essentials. A virtual kickoff was held, and every household received a mailed questionnaire. Additional activities included ideas fairs, presentations to neighborhood groups, and resident-hosted events that helped expand participation. The engagement numbers were cumulative across both the Crossroads and Newport neighborhoods and included over 500 attendees at in-person events, approximately 450 returned questionnaires, and 492 individual visitors to the online engagement platform.

Teun Deuling presented the findings from the first phase of engagement, noting that the goal for this phase was to understand how residents perceive their neighborhoods, what values they hold, and what challenges they face. The resulting insights informed a draft vision and preliminary policy ideas for each area, with a focus on public spaces and neighborhood identity.

For the Crossroads neighborhood, Teun Deuling said the residents expressed appreciation for the area's convenience, proximity to services and businesses, and its notable cultural and demographic diversity. Key aspirations included enhanced opportunities for play and creativity, as well as improved access to green spaces and active transportation options such as walking, biking, and transit.

The Newport residents indicated they value their neighborhood's friendliness, safety, natural environment, and quiet atmosphere. They indicated a strong interest in establishing more community gathering places to foster social interaction, enhancing neighborhood walkability and bike access, and addressing traffic congestion, which was identified as a significant local concern.

Brooke Brod turned to the “Define Phase”, which was just completed. This phase focused on understanding questions around urban design and improvements to public spaces, including streets and trails. The work included pop-up events that encouraged participants to walk through their neighborhood and provide feedback on features they appreciate, as well as areas in need of improvement. There were public workshops held in both neighborhoods that utilized mapping exercises, visual preference surveys, and open discussions. Special efforts were made to engage older adult groups and non-English-speaking communities, particularly in Crossroads.

Based on feedback from earlier neighborhood planning processes, an iterative approach has been adopted. Community members will have opportunities to review and comment on the draft policy proposals through upcoming information sessions and informal office hours. Feedback will also be collected online to ensure wide access.

Teun Deuling said engagement during the Define phase, which spanned from January to early April, included virtual update events in February and a series of three in-person public space events in each neighborhood. Those were supplemented by targeted activities with specific community groups. Over 300 individuals visited the city's online platform, "*Engaging Bellevue*", during the period.

The preliminary results from the recent engagement activities highlighted recurring themes across both neighborhoods. There was strong support voiced for enhanced walking and biking infrastructure, increased recognition of the unique character of each neighborhood, and the establishment of more indoor community gathering spaces.

With regard to the Commission's role, Teun Deuling said adoption of neighborhood area plans will follow the annual Comprehensive Plan Amendment process. The drafting of neighborhood-specific policies based on community input is under way. The drafts will be presented for public review, and that will be followed by study sessions with the Commission, which tentatively are scheduled for June. Each neighborhood area plan will undergo a public hearing and a review process by the Commission. The final recommendations from the Commission will be forwarded to the City Council, likely before the summer recess.

Commissioner Khanloo expressing gratitude for the staff's dedication during the outreach events, noting their commitment even under adverse weather conditions. At one such event there was a moment where two younger students created a collage depicting their vision for walking to school, which included trees and bicycles. The intergenerational approach to participation and the creativity it inspired is appreciated.

Commissioner Lu voiced appreciation for the community-specific responses, including those from middle school students. With regard to the engagement metrics, the staff were asked about the potential overlap in participation among the three main engagement channels, events, questionnaires, and the online hub, and were asked to clarify how any duplication was addressed in evaluating overall participation. Brooke Brod explained that while sign-ins were collected at events and some of the data can be matched, many participants remained anonymous at their option. As such, full accuracy in overlap detection is not possible.

Commissioner Lu asked about the effectiveness of the cultural outreach strategies. Brooke Brod acknowledged the successes in reaching diverse communities, particularly in Crossroads, but noted ongoing efforts are needed to improve engagement with the Chinese- and Korean-speaking populations in Newport, and to build trust with renters and immigrant communities.

Commissioner Villaveces observed that walkability emerged as the top community priority in both neighborhood reports and asked how the input will be applied. Teun Deuling responded that while the neighborhood plans are long-range policy documents similar in function to the Comprehensive Plan, they will influence future work, particularly through collaboration with the transportation department. The specific needs differed by area: in Newport, the focus was on enhancing trails and connectivity to shopping centers and neighboring areas; in Crossroads, the focus was on overcoming historical design challenges such as superblocks and disconnected

pedestrian paths.

Commissioner Bhargava asked whether the participation numbers were statistically meaningful in relation to the overall population of the neighborhoods. Brooke Brod Staff responded that the mailed questionnaire return rates for Crossroads were approximately three percent; they were slightly higher in Newport. That is in line with the expected norms for direct mail. It was acknowledged, however, that there were gaps in representation, particularly among renters, younger residents, and racially diverse communities. Commissioner Bhargava suggested identifying the areas of low participation more precisely and leveraging culturally embedded organizations to improve outreach.

Commissioner Ferris recognized the substantial staff effort but questioned the adequacy of the level of participation. The development of meaningful policies requires broader and deeper community engagement. Outreach should be expanded to homeowners' associations, churches, and other local organizations. The engagement levels may not be sufficient to support policy decisions that could significantly impact the neighborhoods.

Chair Goepple asked how the city balances the need for unified citywide planning with the desire to preserve the distinct identities of individual neighborhoods, and asked how the planning process accounts for variability across neighborhoods while still producing coherent and equitable outcomes. Thara Johnson reminded the Commissioners that time was spent during the Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update process talking about those issues. Flexibility and local nuance are essential components of the planning framework. While citywide priorities such as walkability and connectivity are applied broadly, each neighborhood's planning process is shaped by localized input and distinct histories, and effort is put into tailoring policy recommendations to those differences. Time will also be taken to go back to the community with the draft policies to show how their feedback was reflected.

The Commission indicated a continued interest in both refining the engagement process and ensuring that neighborhood-specific needs are sufficiently reflected in the resulting policies.

Commissioner Ferris raised a point regarding the timing and scale of implementing the middle housing policies and suggested the city could start by meeting the state's minimum requirements, then expanding cautiously as additional neighborhood planning is completed. That approach would allow for more thoughtful integration of increased density in areas that can support it, based on community input and local characteristics. Thara Johnson affirmed that that approach is within the Commission's discretion. It will be part of the upcoming discussion on the middle housing. It was reiterated that no land use map change requests were submitted from Newport or Crossroads neighborhoods during the current planning phase, although opportunities were provided. A rigorous set of criteria was established to guide eligibility for land use changes, and proposals may emerge in future rounds of planning, such as in Eastgate and Factoria. The Commission was reminded that the city recently undertook a holistic review of land use policy as part of the Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update, which may have influenced the lack of additional land use proposals.

Commissioner Khanloo noted having attended public meetings and observed the presence of translation support. The city is to be commended for providing translators, which is a step forward from the Northeast and Northwest neighborhood processes.

9. OTHER BUSINESS – None (10:13 p.m.)

10. APPROVAL OF MINUTES
(10:13 p.m.)

- A. February 26, 2025
- B. March 12, 2025

A motion to approve both sets of minutes was made by Commissioner Ferris. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Khanloo and the motion carried unanimously.

11. EXECUTIVE SESSION – None
(10:15 p.m.)

12. ADJOURNMENT
(10:15 p.m.)

A motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Ferris. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Lu and the motion carried unanimously.

Chair Goepple adjourned the meeting at 10:15 p.m.