



**DATE:** February 1, 2024

**TO:** Environmental Services Commission

**FROM:** Gwen Rousseau, AICP, Senior Planner, Community Development, Planning Division

**SUBJECT:** BelRed Look Forward Comprehensive Plan Amendment – Environment Policy Updates

## **ACTION REQUIRED**

Staff will provide a review of the BelRed Look Forward initiative and will present a preliminary recommendation on draft environmental policy amendments (Attachments A and B) for the BelRed Subarea Plan.

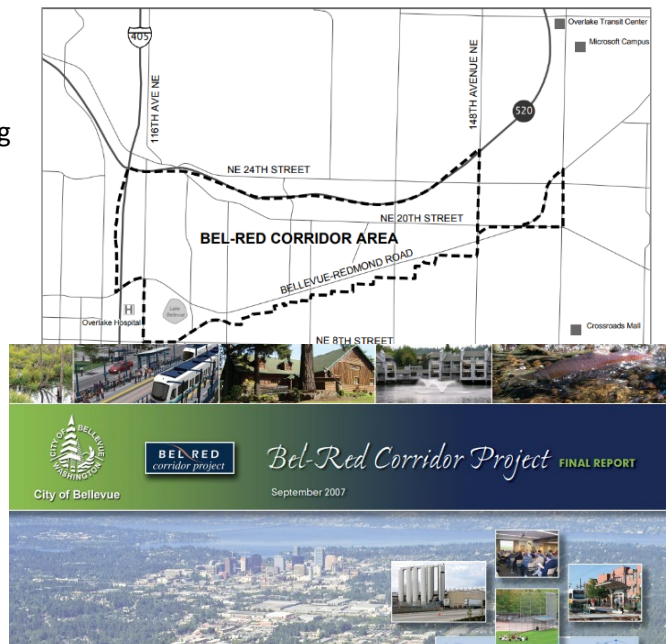
Staff request that the Environmental Services Commission discuss and provide direction on these draft environment policy amendments, and if feasible, approve an Environmental Service Commission recommendation for submittal to the Planning Commission.

## **BACKGROUND / ANALYSIS**

### HISTORY

In 2009, after a multi-year planning process, the City Council adopted a new [BelRed Subarea Plan](#). Similar to the recent Wilburton Commercial Area Study of 2018, the “Bel-Red Corridor” work program engaged a Steering Committee, appointed by the City Council in 2005. This committee included former City Council members, representatives from several Boards and Commissions, and representatives from the area and surrounding community.

Supported by staff and a consultant team, the Steering Committee prepared a final report that formed the basis for the BelRed Subarea Plan and the Land Use Code. These documents implement the vision to transform the BelRed Subarea from a declining light industrial area into an area with “a thriving economy”, “vibrant, diverse and walkable neighborhoods” and “environmental improvements” with “opportunities for major environmental enhancements, including stream corridor restoration and use of natural drainage practices, expanded tree canopy, and environmentally sustainable design.”



A key feature of BelRed is its extensive stream network consisting of five stream systems including the West Tributary to Kelsey Creek, Goff Creek, an unnamed tributary, Valley Creek and Sears Creek. During the BelRed planning process, stream strategies were explored that sought to transform BelRed's streams into community and environmental amenities. These concepts were captured in policies highlighting opportunities for fish passage barrier removal, stream daylighting, and riparian habitat restoration. Policies also highlight opportunities for incorporating green infrastructure, such as natural drainage practices that allow stormwater to infiltrate into soils onsite rather than run off into nearby streams.

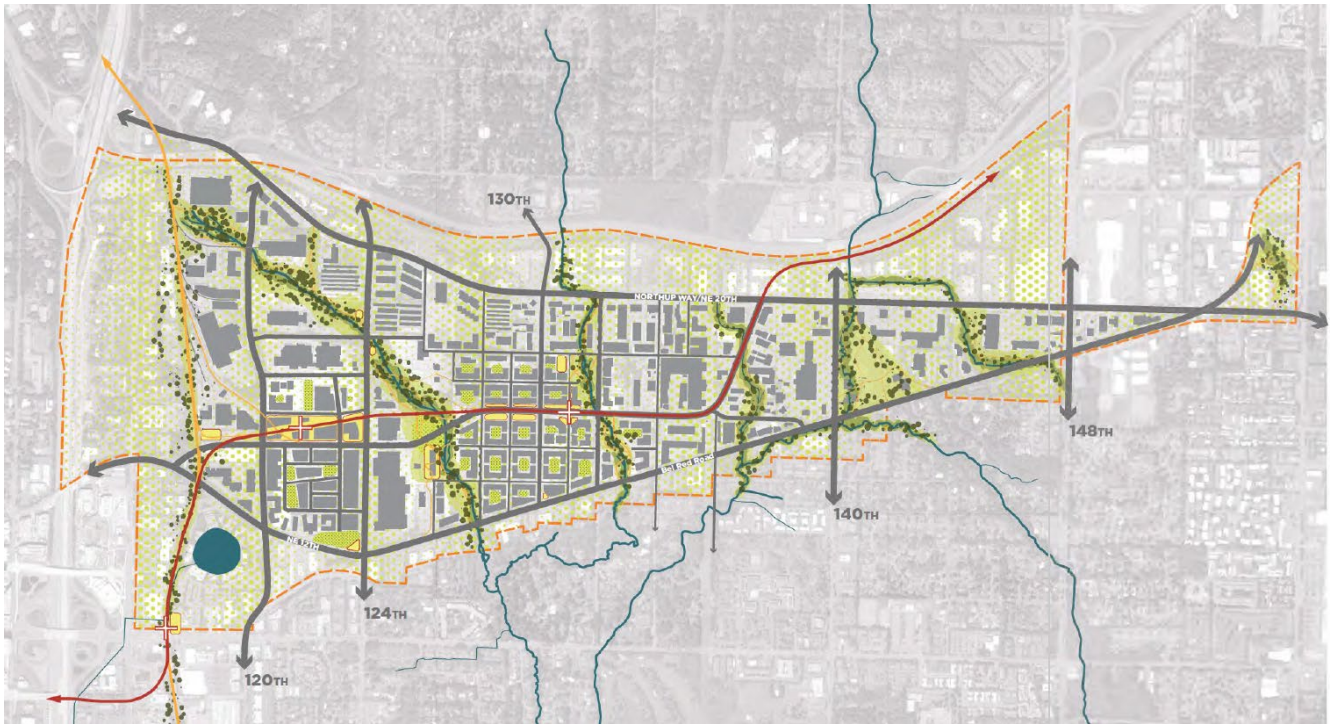
A significant amount of additional development capacity was envisioned for BelRed, which was implemented through provisions in the BelRed [Land Use Code Chapter LUC 20.25D](#). A key provision in the Land Use Code is an incentive system, which provides additional development capacity in exchange for provision of public amenities including stream restoration and use of natural drainage practices.

Many changes have taken place in BelRed under these subarea plan policies and land use regulations. Since 2009, over 2,100 housing units and 2.2 million square feet of non-residential space have been developed, and another 3,100 housing units and 1.3 million square feet of office development are in the pipeline, indicating that BelRed is on track to meeting the housing and job growth projected for the subarea by 2030. In addition, Bellevue's Parks Department began acquiring properties along the West Tributary of Kelsey Creek starting in September of 2009 and will be launching the planning process for that park facility later this year.

Staff have shared the story of the BelRed transformation at various local, state and national conferences, and the BelRed plan itself has won awards, including the Governor's Smart Communities Award in 2010, and the Puget Sound Regional Council Vision 2040 Award in 2010.

#### PROJECT PURPOSE

Now, after more than a decade of experience implementing BelRed policies and regulations, the City Council has directed that the BelRed policies be refreshed to reflect new information, increase capacity to meet new citywide housing and job targets, and to strengthen and clarify direction for implementation. This planning initiative, known as the BelRed Look Forward, is being done in concert with the Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update.



## **POLICY ISSUES**

The focus of this agenda item is on proposed amendments to environmental policies in the BelRed Subarea Plan related to surface and stormwater management. The amendment process will follow the same process as the Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update with the Environmental Services Commission making a recommendation to the Planning Commission and then the Planning Commission making a recommendation to the City Council. Adoption of the BelRed Subarea Plan Comprehensive Plan Amendment is anticipated in September 2024.

Policy moves summarizing the proposed policy amendments (Attachment A and B) include the following:

- Updates to streamline policies and clarify objectives to improve ecological function and resilience.
- Updates to explore and remove regulatory barriers to natural drainage practices.
- Updates to look for regional surface and stormwater facility opportunities that provide for a more coordinated and effective approach to flow control and water treatment.
- A new policy directing the city to develop rehabilitation plans for stream corridors.
- Updates to remove redundant policies covered in Volume 1 of the Comprehensive Plan.

To reflect the broad width of improvements needed within the subarea, proposed updates replace the word “enhance” with the word “improve.” Proposed updates also give direction to identify and remove regulatory barriers to the use of natural drainage practices, which were noted as challenges. To improve efficiency in implementation, another update gives direction to explore cross departmental opportunities for siting regional stormwater facilities.

One new policy is proposed that would facilitate partnerships and coordinated strategies for improving water quality, flow control and fish and wildlife habitat. Please note, to clarify the policy intent, staff are proposing additional modifications to the proposed policy in the public review draft as follows:

S-BR-98. Develop ~~detailed~~ rehabilitation and ~~maintenance~~ restoration plans for the West Tributary, Goff Creek, and Valley/Sears Creek riparian corridors to facilitate partnerships and coordinated

strategies for improving water quality, flow control and wildlife habitat as well as for providing increased access/exposure to nature, aesthetic enhancements, and noise attenuation.

Since the BelRed Subarea Plan was developed between major updates to Volume 1 of the Comprehensive Plan, new policy concepts developed during the subarea planning process were incorporated into the Subarea Plan itself. However since 2009, many of these policy concepts have been adopted into Volume 1 and apply citywide. Therefore, it is no longer necessary to retain certain policies in the Subarea Plan (Volume II) that would be redundant with those in Volume 1.

#### **FISCAL IMPACT**

No fiscal impact is associated with recommending these policy updates.

#### **ATTACHMENTS & AVAILABLE DOCUMENTS**

- A. Proposed Environmental Policy Amendments to the BelRed Subarea Plan (legislative mark-up version)
- B. Proposed Environmental Policy Amendments to the BelRed Subarea Plan (clean version)