



Bellevue Planning Commission

April 24, 2024

PLANNING COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM

SUBJECT

BelRed Look Forward Comprehensive Plan Amendment: Recommended Changes to the BelRed Vision, and General, Housing, Urban Design, and Arts and Culture policies.

STAFF CONTACTS

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POLICY ISSUES

The BelRed Subarea Plan provides policy direction for achieving the vision for the BelRed Subarea. As part of Bellevue's Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update, the BelRed Look Forward planning initiative is amending Subarea Plan policies and Comprehensive Plan land use designations within BelRed. This memo focuses on recommended updates to the BelRed Vision and policies in the following plan sections:

- General
- Housing
- Urban Design
- Arts, Culture, and Creativity

DIRECTION NEEDED FROM THE PLANNING COMMISSION

ACTION



DIRECTION



INFORMATION ONLY



At this meeting, the Planning Commission will review recommended updates to the BelRed Vision, and general, housing, urban design, and arts and culture policies and provide direction for further follow-up if needed.

BACKGROUND

The BelRed Subarea Plan provides policy guidance for implementing the BelRed vision. As part of the overall Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update, the BelRed Look Forward is amending policies and future land use designations to reflect changed circumstances from 2009, when the plan was first adopted. This initiative aims to strengthen and clarify policy direction for implementation and increase capacity to meet new citywide housing and job targets.

While the intent of the BelRed Look Forward planning initiative is to strengthen and clarify policy direction to implement the BelRed vision, not to update the vision itself, some updates to the BelRed Vision are being recommended to update terminology, and to highlight the importance of the BelRed Arts District. Recommended changes to the BelRed Vision can be found in Attachment A to this memo.

Planning Commission Review

The Planning Commission is directed by city code to review, consider amendments, and make recommendations to the City Council on the Comprehensive Plan (Bellevue City Code 3.64.070).

The Planning Commission was introduced to the scope and schedule of the BelRed Look Forward initiative on February 22, 2023. Commissioners supported the overall scope and encouraged staff to emphasize updates that would:

- encourage development of diverse types of housing, including affordable housing and production of family sized units,
- prevent displacement of BelRed's small and unique businesses,
- review ped/bike connections and consider extending the local street grid through the lens of a multi-modal network, and
- apply the lens of sustainability to everything from building typologies to transportation, to environmental issues.

On December 13, 2023 staff shared draft policy moves related to Land Use and Urban Form and Cultural and Community Connections, which included policy moves for Housing, Urban Design, and Arts and Culture. Commission direction and recommended policy updates are described in each policy update section below.

Community Engagement

In mid-January, staff released draft policies for public review requesting feedback on which policy moves sounded good, if any ideas or considerations were missing, and what they wanted Board and Commission members to know as they discussed and made their recommendations. Summaries of community feedback are provided in each policy section below, and verbatim comments are included in Attachment D to this memo.

At this meeting, the Planning Commission will review recommended updates to the BelRed Vision and policy amendments to the General, Housing, Urban Design, and Arts and Culture sections of the Subarea Plan. Updates are described at a high level by each section below. All

policy amendments can be found in Attachment B to this memo. Recommended updates were informed by community input, analyses, and Commission direction.

GENERAL POLICY UPDATES

One goal and three general policies provide overarching direction for implementing the vision of BelRed being a model of smart growth and sustainability. Existing policies focus on two of the three components of sustainability – the economy and the environment. A third policy is proposed to incorporate the third dimension of sustainability, namely social equity. It calls for consideration of those most vulnerable when designing strategies to implement the vision.

Below are changes recommended to the general policies. Changes that are a clarification or a grammatical change are not included below. The largest number of changes in this section were to streamline policies and clarify policy intent. One new policy was added to include social equity. Attachment B contains the strike/underline of all general policy changes, including minor edits that are not highlighted in this memo.

General

Goal (as amended): To build upon BelRed’s existing economic, cultural, and natural assets, while integrating new places to live, work, recreate, and connect.

Old S-BR-1. Repealed due to redundancy with land use goal statement.

S-BR-1. Updated to highlight the importance of creative and cultural businesses to BelRed and to ensure provision of basic goods and services for BelRed residents.

S-BR-2. Updated to streamline policy and clarify intent of minimizing environmental impacts of growth. Note – the Commission already reviewed this policy during their April 10 meeting.

S-BR-3 – Added to provide direction for achieving the third pillar of sustainability – social equity.

HOUSING POLICY UPDATES

Having a broad range of housing types that meet the needs of a diverse population of varied income levels is a key component of the BelRed vision and is reinforced by state, regional and citywide policies that require cities to address racially disparate impacts and advance racial equity in their housing policies.

On December 13, 2023 Commissioners recommended setting specific goals for housing types and affordability including affordable artist housing. Since the Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update is happening simultaneously, amendments to housing policies within the BelRed Subarea Plan are focused primarily on maintaining alignment with the overall citywide affordable housing strategy. Only policies reflecting unique aspects of BelRed are recommended for inclusion in the BelRed Subarea Plan. Policies also call for encouraging a diversity of housing affordable to all income levels within each BelRed neighborhood district, including ownership and rental opportunities.

Throughout the engagement process, the community has communicated consistently how they value adding to the overall supply of housing, especially the supply of affordable housing. They

have also expressed a desire to see more housing growth occur in Transit Oriented Development areas like BelRed. Community feedback related to Housing during Phase 3 voiced strong support for increasing housing supply and affordability within every neighborhood district, aligning affordable housing policies with the citywide approach, and calling for renter and owner affordability within every BelRed neighborhood district.

When asked if anything was missing, respondents suggested encouraging development of housing affordable to the middle class as well as creating mechanisms for low-income people to build equity. One respondent expressed opposition to redevelopment due to a concern that redevelopment would result in business displacement. Others voiced opposition to affordability mandates and support for reducing impacts of regulation on the cost and speed of housing development. All responses related to housing from the Land Use and Urban Form Questionnaire are included in Attachment C.

Below are the proposed updates to BelRed housing policies. Changes that are a clarification or a grammatical change are not included below. The largest changes in this section were removal of policies that were redundant with policies in Volume 1 of the Comprehensive Plan and streamlining of policies to help clarify policy intent. Attachment B contains the strike/underline of all housing policy changes, including minor edits that are not highlighted in this memo.

Housing

Goal (as amended): To accommodate people at all stages of life by meeting the housing needs of all household types, sizes, and incomes wanting to live in BelRed.

- S-BR-63. Updated housing terminology – lowrise, midrise, and highrise.
- S-BR-64 & 65. Streamlined policies to ensure alignment with citywide affordable housing strategy, and to clarify intent of achieving housing affordable to a range of incomes within every neighborhood district.

URBAN DESIGN POLICY UPDATES

The urban form of BelRed's streets will determine how successful BelRed is at being a transit-oriented district that encourages people to walk and socialize within the public realm. The Urban Design section of the plan focuses primarily on guidance related to creating a distinct sense of place and improving the pedestrian experience of walking throughout the subarea.

On December 13, 2023 Commissioners recommended encouraging the kind of development the city wants that would result in vehicular trips being converted into pedestrian trips.

Throughout the engagement process, the community has consistently communicated how they value walkability and ensuring pedestrian safety. BelRed residents ranked having the ability to walk to a meeting place as their number one priority and 93 percent of BelRed respondents expressed a preference for pedestrian and bike-oriented street design that prioritizes safety and slower speeds over streets designed for efficient automobile traffic. Community feedback related to Cultural and Community Connections during Phase 3 included support for improving walkability by integrating art and creating a safe, comfortable, and vibrant pedestrian

experience. One respondent suggested encouraging various food trucks in the area to provide excitement. All responses related to urban design from the Land Use and Urban Form Questionnaire are included in Attachment D.

Below are updates to the Urban Design policies. Clarifications or grammatical changes are not included below. Most recommended changes in this section aim to streamline policies and clarify intent. Other modifications seek to broaden language and encourage the incorporation of art. Six policies are recommended for repeal due to redundancy with policy in Volume 1. Attachment B contains the strike/underline of all Urban Design policy recommendations, including minor edits that are not highlighted in this memo.

Urban Design

Goal (as amended): To achieve a pedestrian friendly, transit and trail-oriented built environment that promotes interconnected, human scale, and welcoming places, evokes nature and creativity, and that produces a dynamic public realm that encourages social interaction.

Sense of Place

- S-BR-36. Updated to streamline policy and clarify intent.
- Old S-BR-15, 17, 19, 21, 22, and 24 are recommended for repeal as they are redundant with policies in Volume 1 of the Comprehensive Plan.
- S-BR-37. Updated to focus attention on the importance of arts in placemaking.
- S-BR-39. Updated to broaden historic context.
- S-BR-40. Updated to use more inclusive language, current terminology, and to add in public art.
- S-BR-41. Added to incorporate strategy for enhancing recognition of the Arts District.

Pedestrian Experience

- S-BR-42. Updated to remove limiting list, many items of which are redundant with policies in Volume 1.
- S-BR-43. Added to ensure access to Eastrail is incorporated into site designs.
- S-BR-44. Added to expand qualifiers to desired pedestrian experience.

ARTS AND CULTURE POLICY UPDATES

Arts, culture, and creativity are central to BelRed's community, economy, and to the design of its built environment. Anchored in innovation by creative individuals, businesses, and organizations, BelRed is, and will continue to be, a regional destination for creatives of all ages.

Arts, Culture and Creativity policies reinforce that arts, culture and creativity are inherent to community life, public space, and to people's relationship to nature. They provide guidance for building the capacity of organizations that support the arts community in BelRed. They also

provide direction to enhance the visibility of the Arts District and to secure space for creative entities and for community connection.

On December 13, 2023 Commissioners recommended:

- Developing concrete measures to ensure affordability for arts and cultural organizations going forward,
- Fostering development of affordable space by establishing a fund for affordable loans that could be used for developing affordable spaces,
- Setting specific goals for affordable space for artists to work,
- Fostering arts incubator spaces with city funds,
- Fostering multi-generational involvement in the arts from children and teens and on up to older adults,
- Involving artists in the development of sites and design of buildings,
- Encouraging specific signage for the arts district to increase visibility of the district, and
- Integrating space for the performing arts as well as space where people can see art being made to increase visibility of the arts.

Throughout the engagement process, community members have communicated their love for arts and culture and a desire for increasing the number of fun destinations and experiences within the city. Community feedback related to Arts and Culture during Phase 3 included support for the arts in general, and for securing a dedicated central meeting space for events, classes, programs, and other arts uses. In addition, policy calling for securing long-term affordable arts space as well as affordable artist housing was valued. Related to what is missing, some respondents voiced an interest in seeing live music performances, and for encouraging ethnic oriented events. All responses to the Cultural and Community Connections questionnaire are included in Attachment E.

Bellevue's Arts Commission reviewed proposed arts and culture policies at their March 6 meeting. They provided direction, and then unanimously approved recommended Arts policy amendments for the BelRed Subarea Plan as part of the BelRed Look Forward Comprehensive Plan Amendment.

New recommended arts, culture, and creativity policies provide high level direction for programs and investments that could include implementation of many of the specific strategies recommended above. As shown in the policy update section below, arts, culture, and creativity policies provide broad direction within four policy areas related to organization, visibility, creative space, and community connection. Six are new policies reflecting the growth and development of the arts community and the need for more focused guidance to ensure its continued growth and development. Other modifications seek to clarify policy intent. Below are the recommended updates to the Arts and Culture policies. Changes that are a clarification or a grammatical change are not included below. Attachment B contains the strike/underline of all Arts and Culture policy recommendations, including minor edits that are not highlighted in this memo.

Arts, Culture, and Creativity

Goal (as amended): To build and sustain BelRed as a destination for the creative and innovative communities, anchored by the BelRed Arts District with a wealth of engaging and affordable arts and cultural spaces, events and programs, creative businesses, and community-serving organizations.

Organization

- S-BR-66. Added to provide direction for supporting community-based organizations focused on supporting the BelRed Arts community.

Visibility

- S-BR-67-69 Updated to clarify policy intents highlighting the importance of funding, integration into public infrastructure, and investment in art to increasing the visibility of the Arts District.

Creative Space

- S-BR-70-72. Updated to clarify policy intents to use several specific strategies to help arts and cultural entities secure affordable space for their work.
- S-BR-73. Added to support provision of affordable artist housing through incentives in the Arts District Intensive Area.

Community Connection

- S-BR-74-77. Added to provide direction for multiple types of investment in space, programs, infrastructure, and grants for events to provide greater opportunities for community connection.

ATTACHMENTS

- A. Recommended Updates to the BelRed Vision
- B. Recommended Policy Amendments
- C. Land Use and Urban Form Questionnaire Responses related to Housing Policy Moves
- D. Land Use and Urban Form Questionnaire Responses related to Urban Design Policy Moves
- E. Cultural and Community Connections Questionnaire Responses related to Arts and Culture Policy moves
- F. Comprehensive Plan Glossary