



Bellevue Planning Commission

September 11, 2024

PLANNING COMMISSION STUDY SESSION ITEM

SUBJECT

Study Session on the Wilburton Vision Implementation Land Use Code Amendment (LUCA).

STAFF CONTACT(S)

Kristina Gallant, Planning Manager, 452-6196

Nick Whipple, Assistant Director, 452-4578

Development Services

POLICY ISSUES

On July 23, the City Council adopted Ordinance No. 6802 amending the Comprehensive Plan's Volume 2 Wilburton/N.E. 8th Street Subarea Plan with proposed Wilburton Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) area policies and map changes. The LUCA implementing these policy and map changes is under development.

DIRECTION NEEDED FROM THE PLANNING COMMISSION

ACTION

DIRECTION

INFORMATION ONLY

This study session serves as a briefing on the scope and approach for the LUCA and a progress report on outreach and analysis completed since the Planning Commission made a recommendation on the Comprehensive Plan Amendment (CPA) on May 1. Staff anticipate at least two study sessions reviewing proposed Land Use Code amendments to take place between the fourth quarter of 2024 and first quarter of 2025.

BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS

Legislative History

The Wilburton Vision Implementation Initiative CPA and LUCA was introduced to the Planning Commission at their May 11, 2022 study session following official launch of the initiative with the City Council on April 25, 2022. The Planning Commission held 16 study sessions on the CPA between the launch and public hearing, including an introduction to the general structure of the LUCA on February 14. The Planning Commission also provided direction to guide code development for transportation, streets, and blocks on March 27. The Planning Commission recommended approval of the CPA on May 1, following the public hearing.

The City Council reviewed the Planning Commission's recommendation on the CPA during a study session on June 25. During the meeting, City Councilmembers discussed the Planning Commission's decision to recommend a mixed use land use district instead of medical office on the east side of 116th Avenue NE. Staff shared the Planning Commission's robust discussion around the need for life sciences and medical offices while also allowing development flexibility. Ultimately, the City Council agreed with the Planning Commission's conclusion on this topic, while reinforcing the opportunity to support medical and life sciences. The City Council also discussed:

- Ensuring transportation infrastructure can support planned densities
- Continuing to support a mix of uses in the Wilburton TOD area

- Support for the sustainable district concept and creating a community with strong transit access
- Interest in providing affordable commercial space for small businesses
- Emphasis on the importance of encouraging a walkable, affordable community
- Praise for robust public engagement

Following discussion of the CPA, staff provided an update on priorities to be implemented through the LUCA, including land uses, site organization, density and dimensional standards, design standards, landscaping, and incentives. Staff also noted parallel efforts related to the LUCA, including the development of a sustainable district framework and a multimodal access and walkability concept for the Wilburton TOD area, to be incorporated within the City’s Transportation Design Manual. Following the staff presentation, Council discussion included:

- Direction to hold an additional community information session over the summer
- Exploring opportunities to build in policies and tools to accommodate fluctuations in the economic climate for development
- Emphasis on the importance of supporting housing production

The City Council voted to adopt Ordinance No. 6802 implementing the Wilburton Vision Implementation CPA on July 23.

LUCA Development Approach and Overview

On May 31, staff published a preliminary draft of the LUCA for public review and stakeholder discussion, introducing two distinct options for addressing our affordable housing need in Wilburton. The intent for presenting different options was to highlight different implementation pathways for certain policy issues, and a future staff recommendation on the LUCA could incorporate a mix of provisions in both options. [Option A](#) incorporates a mandatory affordable housing approach, meaning projects would be required to include affordable housing as part of redevelopment. This approach is balanced with higher base floor area ratios (FARs), or “by-right” development, and no minimum parking requirements. [Option B](#) proposes a voluntary approach through incentive zoning. With this approach, projects may provide affordable housing in order to build a larger building. This affordable housing approach provides lower base FARs and reduced minimum parking requirements compared to other areas in the city.

Since publishing the draft LUCA, staff have been working externally and internally to review extensive stakeholder comments and develop proposed revisions, balancing the TOD area’s long term community vision with the diverse stakeholder needs and priorities. A number of provisions have changed substantially since the preliminary drafts are released, and updated language will be available soon. The Planning Commission will consider both the mandatory and incentive-based affordable housing approaches as part of the full LUCA review later this year and early next year. Other key elements of the LUCA are summarized below.

Land Use Districts

The LUCA will establish new development regulations and Land Use Districts to align with the Comprehensive Plan Future Land Use Map designations recently adopted for Wilburton. These districts are intended to foster flexible urban development ranging from midrise to highrise. The LUCA establishes base and maximum building height limits and FARs for all districts, with participation in the amenity incentive system required to build past base standards up to the maximum.

This flexibility extends to the LUCA's approach with allowed uses. Historically, the City's practice has been to list all uses which are permitted within a district. To foster flexibility over time, the Wilburton Vision Implementation LUCA instead takes the approach of establishing a limited set of uses which are prohibited or only allowed through a conditional use process. These uses are only those which are deemed as incompatible with the urban, walkable vision for the Wilburton TOD area, and all other uses are allowed outright. This approach is used in other innovative districts such as Seattle's South Lake Union.

While the LUCA no longer incorporates a specific medical office district, it is incorporating development regulations to support the specific needs of life science uses. The working draft LUCA establishes a new definition for life science uses as "facilities, such as laboratories, and ancillary offices dedicated to development, research, and production of biological and biotechnical discoveries and products". This definition will be available for application throughout the city and can be used to inform regulations in other districts. In the Wilburton TOD area, specific development flexibility is being incorporated for life science uses, including flexibility on building height to accommodate necessary mechanical equipment and unlimited building floor plates up to 100 feet in building height. These provisions were developed in consultation with developers of life science projects.

Access, Streets, and Blocks

One of the Wilburton TOD area's most important goals is to become a walkable, active community with robust multimodal connections, building on the presence of Eastrail, Grand Connection, bus rapid transit, and light rail access. At present, the Wilburton TOD area's large blocks do not support this vision. Staff have developed access concepts to implement necessary mobility improvements and connections with development, while maintaining flexibility. The approach builds upon lessons and examples learned in BelRed and East Main.

The draft LUCA establishes maximum perimeters and lengths for blocks, while providing options for blocks to be bounded by public rights-of-way, private access corridors, Eastrail, or the Grand Connection. The Transportation Design Manual will include a design guide to guide city staff and development teams toward implementing access improvements, including flexible access and active transportation corridors, through the development review process. Sites smaller than 100,000 square feet are exempt from perimeter block requirements. The draft LUCA also establishes requirements for connections to Eastrail.

Sustainable District Framework

The Wilburton Vision Implementation CPA supports the development of "an environmentally resilient neighborhood through a sustainable district framework, code updates, and public-private partnerships." Common elements of sustainable districts include district-specific development standards (e.g. green building), shared infrastructure such as district energy or green stormwater, explicit prioritization of pedestrian and bicycle mobility, abundant greenery/natural areas, and keystone gathering spaces such as pedestrian promenades or parks.

This current phase of the Sustainable District Opportunity Assessment, which was discussed with the Planning Commission at the July 24 Planning Commission meeting, is proceeding parallel to the LUCA, and will culminate in a Sustainable District Strategy. The current draft LUCA incorporates certain elements of the sustainable district concept, including development standards, design guidelines, and

incentives related to green building, green factor/landscaping, and connection to district-scale systems such as district energy. Design guidelines are integrated into the LUCA to assist new development in effectively implementing the city's sustainable district priorities and concepts through the design of buildings, sites, and open spaces.

Open Space and Green Factor

The initial draft LUCA incorporates increased open space requirements compared to Downtown, with flexibility for small sites. The draft LUCA provides different options to meet this requirement, including counting open space provided as part of access corridors and in publicly accessible podiums and rooftop spaces.

The Wilburton TOD area uses a Green Factor approach to landscaping, similar to Downtown. Under this approach, projects must achieve a minimum Green Factor, selecting from a menu of options which are compatible with urban development. The draft LUCA has implemented increased scoring for tree retention compared to Downtown to encourage tree retention.

Building Design

To help support projects in accommodating other standards, the draft LUCA proposes greater simplicity for tower setbacks and floorplates compared to Downtown. Standards are simplified further for proposals incorporating mass timber construction, which provide an efficient, sustainable alternative to conventional steel and concrete construction.

Amenity Incentive System

Under the Wilburton TOD area's Amenity Incentive System, projects earn points for providing specific public amenities. Each point earned provides one square foot of floor area beyond the base FAR defined for the Land Use Districts. Projects can earn as many amenity points as needed to achieve the maximum FAR and building height. Amenity points can be earned by providing:

- Affordable housing, either on-site or as fee-in-lieu, beyond any minimum requirement. Additional bonus points are provided for achieving deeper levels of affordability.
- Family-sized housing units
- Green building certification above the minimum required
- Affordable commercial space
- Enhanced critical area restoration
- Additional open space beyond the minimum required
- Eastrail corridor improvements
- Grand Connection improvements

The specific points provided by amenities are being calibrated as the draft LUCA is finalized and reviewed with stakeholders.

Additional Analyses

The City contracted with Community Attributes Inc. (economic analysis) and NBBJ (sustainability and urban design) to analyze the financial and development feasibility of proposed design guidelines, dimensional requirements, sustainability opportunities, and amenities in delivering desired public benefits for the Wilburton TOD area. This work built from the policy direction in the proposed policy

amendments and is informing the LUCA. The Community Attributes model is being used to test variations in the amenity incentive system and development requirements.

Community Attributes has begun a second phase of work conducting an affordable housing nexus study. The purpose of this study is to estimate the impact that new market rate residential and commercial development has in increasing demand for affordable housing. The study will then estimate the cost to develop the housing necessary to mitigate these impacts. This analysis is critical to inform any mandatory affordable housing approach but will also provide useful context for any incentive-based program. While development feasibility analysis considers the impact of affordable housing requirements on the economic viability of individual development projects, nexus studies determine the maximum fee a city can impose on development based on the project's impact, similar to impact fee studies.

Public Engagement

Engagement specific to the LUCA builds on extensive engagement on the initiative as a whole throughout 2022 and 2023. Since the public draft LUCA was released on May 31, staff have held 12 engagement meetings, including a public information session. These meetings have included direct engagement with Wilburton property owners, affordable housing groups, and the Bellevue Development Committee, and other interested parties.

In late July, staff assembled a group of Wilburton property owners and stakeholders to review updates to the LUCA and discuss issues for implementation through a series of topical workshops. Three topical workshops have been completed to date, covering Access, Streets, and Blocks; Dimensions, Uses, and Nonconformances; and Green Building requirements and incentives. During these workshops, staff revisit stakeholder comments on these topics, present initial staff-reviewed amendments and responses, and gather ideas from the group on alternative approaches. Cross-team and -department vetting is required to review alternatives developed in these workshops.

Remaining significant topics to discuss with stakeholders include departure procedures, affordable housing requirements, site design, and the amenity incentive system. Workshops will continue through September and early October on these components.

ATTACHMENT(S)

N/A