

CITY OF BELLEVUE
CITY COUNCIL

Summary Minutes of Extended Study Session

September 24, 2018
6:00 p.m.

Council Conference Room
Bellevue, Washington

PRESENT: Mayor Chelminiak, Deputy Mayor Robinson and Councilmembers Lee, Nieuwenhuis, Robertson¹, Stokes, and Zahn

ABSENT: None.

1. Approval of Agenda

The meeting was called to order at 6:03 p.m., with Mayor Chelminiak presiding.

- Deputy Mayor Robinson moved to approve the agenda, and Councilmember Stokes seconded the motion.
- The motion carried by a vote of 7-0.

2. Oral Communications

- (a) Alex Zimmerman said he has been attending the meetings of the King County Housing Authority for more than 10 years, and he is not confident in their leadership. He questioned how they are spending their money because there still is not enough affordable housing. He noted he complained about the agency to the FBI twice, but the situation has not improved. He said he does not have confidence in the Bellevue Police Department and feels he has been treated unfairly by them.
- (b) Barbara Spindel said the Newport Way sidewalk project needs to proceed in a timely manner. She noted that the undergrounding of utilities is not included in the project design. She said any delay would be inconsistent with residents' expectations regarding the completion of the project. Ms. Spindel said the project was initiated several years ago. She said it has been great to work with the City's transportation staff, who held two open houses to ensure that the project meets the residents' safety expectations. The estimated completion date for the project is 2020. Ms. Spindel said the sidewalk committee

¹ Councilmember Robertson left the meeting at 9:03 p.m.

addressed the issue of undergrounding utilities on May 31, 2017, and the committee voted against replacing the utility poles with underground utilities.

- (c) Don Marsh said he would like to see the Newport Way sidewalk project move forward as well. He said the May 2017 proposal for undergrounding utilities was a response to the power outage in February 2017 when wires were downed during an ice and snow event. He said undergrounding utilities would be a good investment and should not cause significant delays to the sidewalk project. He noted that tree cutting is underway, and he expressed concern that the project is proceeding without all of the required easements.

3. Executive Session

At 6:13 p.m., Mayor Chelminiak declared recess to Executive Session for approximately 20 minutes to discuss one item of property disposition.

At 6:30 p.m., City Clerk Kyle Stannert announced that the Executive Session would be extended for approximately 10 more minutes. At 6:45 p.m., Mr. Stannert said the meeting would be extended until approximately 7:00 p.m.

The meeting resumed at 7:06 p.m., with Mayor Chelminiak presiding.

4. Study Session

- (a) Council Business and New Initiatives

There was no discussion.

- (b) Briefing on King County Housing Authority

City Manager Brad Miyake noted there would be two presentations related to regional issues. He welcomed staff from the King County Housing Authority (KCHA) and the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT).

Joyce Nichols, Director of Intergovernmental Relations, introduced Stephen Norman, Executive Director of the King County Housing Authority, to provide an overview of the agency's activities.

Mr. Norman said Bellevue has been a leader in affordable housing through A Regional Coalition for Housing (ARCH) as well as through its incentive zoning, adoption of the Homeless Services Uses Land Use Code Amendment (LUCA), multifamily tax exemption, and financial support to preserve the Highland Village apartments as low-income housing. He said the KCHA was established in 1939 and is not a part of King County government. The agency does not receive ongoing funding support from either the County or the State. KCHA's funding comes primarily from the federal government and through rental income.

Mr. Norman said the rental stock in Bellevue is increasing but the affordability for many renters is declining. He said the number of housing units affordable to households earning below 80

percent of the area median income (AMI) declined by approximately 1,000 units between 2000 and 2015. However, the number of units affordable to households below 50 percent AMI has increased by approximately 850 units. The majority of the latter units are provided primarily through the efforts of ARCH and the KCHA. The percentage of units affordable to households earning below 80 percent AMI has decreased from 71 percent of the inventory in 2000 to 50 percent of the inventory now.

Mr. Norman said federal funding has decreased, and the 2019 federal budget proposes reducing public housing operating funds by 50 percent and eliminating all funding assistance for repairs in federally subsidized buildings. He noted the challenge of steadily increasing rental costs in Bellevue since the end of the recession. He said many families/households have relocated to more affordable areas in the region and continue to commute to Bellevue, which exacerbates traffic congestion.

The housing wage in Bellevue, or the income necessary to afford a two-bedroom unit at 30 percent of household income, is currently \$46 per hour in zip code 98007, which is much of the 148th Avenue corridor between I-90 and the Bellevue Golf Course. The typical wage for baristas and cashiers is approximately \$12 per hour, and the wage for customer service representatives and medical assistants is approximately \$19 per hour. One-third of Bellevue's jobs pay less than \$35,000 annually.

Mr. Norman said the KCHA supports 2,380 households, for a total of 5,500 individuals, in Bellevue. Half of those households fall below 30 percent AMI, and half earn between 30 percent and 80 percent AMI. There are three federally subsidized public housing programs with a total of 109 units in Bellevue: Eastside Terrace, College Place, and eight single-family homes in East Bellevue purchased in 1994 in partnership with the City.

Bellevue has 295 units of federally subsidized preservation housing in Eastwood Square, Bellevue Manor, Spiritwood Manor, Hidden Village, and Newport. Bellevue Manor, a 66-unit senior adult complex on Bellevue Way south of Main Street, was acquired by the KCHA in 2013.

The third category of housing programs is partnerships with nonprofit organizations and ARCH. The KCHA provides approximately \$1 million in annual operating assistance to ARCH projects in Bellevue.

The fourth major program provides tenant-based vouchers for housing with private landlords. The household pays 30 percent of their income in rent, and the difference between that and the contract rental cost is covered by KCHA subsidies provided directly to the landlords. Mr. Norman said there are 791 households in Bellevue that rely on Section 8 vouchers to pay rent to 215 private landlords, and 394 households use Section 8 vouchers to live in KCHA properties. Subsidies are adjusted to reflect local market conditions, and the subsidy for a two-bedroom unit in Bellevue ranges from \$1,670 to \$2,065. Mr. Norman noted uncertainty about whether KCHA will be able to sustain that subsidy level given the proposed budget cuts by the current federal administration. Federal subsidies in Bellevue housing units total \$19 million annually.

The fifth major program area is workforce housing for households earning between 30 percent and 80 percent AMI. This housing does not include rent subsidies. The acquisition of existing housing is a key element in the KCHA's strategy to prevent the loss of affordable housing. KCHA has acquired eight workforce housing complexes in Bellevue, including Highland Village. Mr. Norman highlighted public housing and preservation sites in Bellevue: Eastside Terrace, Hidden Village, and Spiritwood Manor. ARCH projects include the August Wilson Place, which provides housing for homeless veterans, disabled individuals, and families, and Imagine Housing's Chalet Apartments serving low-income families. Recent acquisitions include Highland Village for low-income families and Bellevue Manor's senior and disabled housing.

Mr. Norman acknowledged the City's \$2 million contribution to preserve Highland Village. He said the apartment complex was in poor condition and renovations are underway. Twelve units will be removed and replaced with 36 new units. The KCHA is adding a playground and office, and 13 of the new units will have three bedrooms.

Overall, of the 1,381 federally subsidized low-income households, 21 percent are disabled households, 42 percent house elderly individuals, and 37 percent are not elderly or disabled. The median income is \$9,519 for senior and disabled households and \$16,003 for the non-elderly, non-disabled households. Approximately 57 percent of the households are white, 18 percent are African-American, 11 percent are Asian, and 8 percent are Hispanic.

Mr. Norman said KCHA units house nearly 900 very low-income children. He noted after-school programming at the Spiritwood Manor Boys and Girls Club, Eastside Terrace Boys and Girls Club, and Hidden Village Boys and Girls Club. He thanked the Council for its ongoing support of the Boys and Girls Clubs of Bellevue. He said KCHA is partnering with the Bellevue School District this year to implement the Baby Academy, an early learning program for children up to three years old. He noted a successful, similar three-year pilot program in the Highline School District. The Bellevue program will be supported by funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation for the first year.

The KCHA's workforce housing provides 240 units at Timberwood apartment complex and 191 units at the Landmark complex. Mr. Norman said KCHA does not lower rental rates when they acquire the properties. However, rents are increased only as operating costs increase. Mr. Norman said KCHA operates the countywide weatherization and home repair program, which provided \$1.6 million in home repair work at 125 sites from 2013 to 2017, in partnership with the City of Bellevue. In addition, \$2.7 million in federal and state utility funding was used to complete weatherization projects in 471 housing units/homes.

Mr. Norman said KCHA's current Bellevue initiatives are the continued recapitalization of the existing housing inventory at Spiritwood Manor, Somerset Gardens, Highland Village and, in 2020, Bellevue Manor. Bellevue Manor does not currently have a fire sprinkler system. He summarized the agency's interest in future partnership opportunities, noting that KCHA would like to be able to layer federal operating subsidies on the multifamily tax exemption (MFTE), incentive zoning, and transit-oriented development (TOD).

Mr. Norman said KCHA would like to engage in a pilot project with the City and to increase its outreach to landlords. He noted that 25 percent of the households in King County that receive a voucher cannot find housing and must return the voucher to the KCHA.

Councilmember Nieuwenhuis thanked the King County Housing Authority for its services, data collection, and partnerships. He said he appreciates the goal of focusing on children in an effort to enhance their potential for success in life. Responding to Mr. Nieuwenhuis, Mr. Norman said the Boys and Girls Clubs at the three apartment complexes were built by the KCHA. In further response, Mr. Norman said the average length of stay for a non-elderly, non-disabled household is approximately six years. He said the KCHA is involved in a self-sufficiency program with Bellevue College to work with individuals. However, wage rates have not kept pace with housing costs and it is increasingly difficult to find affordable housing. In further response, Mr. Norman said he would follow up with information regarding the waitlist for three-bedroom apartments.

Councilmember Zahn recalled that the situation with Highland Village apartments was raised through communications with the Bellevue School District by families who were concerned about the potential for eviction. Responding to Ms. Zahn, Mr. Norman said he could provide a list of the housing complexes with the lowest income households. He said that all low-income housing in Bellevue is at risk of being lost. He noted that roughly one-third of the jobs in Bellevue represent households earning at or below 30 percent AMI. In further response, Mr. Norman said the KCHA coordinates with Bellevue's home repair program, which is funded through the federal Community Development Block Grant program. Ms. Zahn noted that she is grateful for the work of the KCHA.

Councilmember Stokes thanked Mr. Norman for the detailed presentation. Mr. Stokes said he will never forget the gratitude displayed when it was announced that the Highland Village apartments would be preserved for low-income housing. He said he appreciates the emphasis on early education.

Councilmember Lee thanked Mr. Norman for the thorough presentation and commended the KCHA's partnerships with ARCH, nonprofit organizations, and local governments. Responding to Mr. Lee, Mr. Norman said the cities of Renton and Seattle have their own housing authorities. However, the three housing authorities in King County collaborate on a number of issues. In further response, Mr. Norman said there are approximately 10,000 individuals/households on the KCHA waitlist. He confirmed that the elderly population is increasing, and the individuals who are currently aging out of the workplace are less financially secure than their parents' generation. He said an increasing number of senior adults are entering shelters.

Deputy Mayor Robinson thanked the KCHA for their work and expressed concern regarding the percentage of households earning 0-30 percent AMI, who would otherwise be homeless without public assistance. She noted that 75 percent of those individuals are working at minimum wage jobs.

Responding to Deputy Mayor Robinson, Mr. Norman said landlords are not required to accept housing vouchers, and many are not interested in accepting vouchers due to the increasing

demand for housing and the ability to charge higher rents. However, it is illegal to refuse a potential tenant based solely on their receipt of public assistance.

Mayor Chelminiak said he hears stories from individuals that they managed to pay rent early in their career, often by living with roommates. However, rents have increased beyond the pace of income.

Mr. Chelminiak asked Mr. Norman to comment on the policy issues the City Council could consider to increase the availability of affordable housing in mixed income neighborhoods. Mr. Norman said an increase in housing supply helps somewhat. However, the cash investments required to provide affordable housing have not been the responsibility of local governments. He said cities could consider being more aggressive with requirements for developers to provide affordable housing. He noted that the KCHA is developing a mixed income community in White Center, which includes the opportunity for home ownership. Land is sold to developers at market rates, and profit participation agreements identify the percentage of profits that will be returned to the KCHA. Mr. Norman said the infrastructure and services provided by a local jurisdiction make this approach an attractive real estate investment for private developers.

Mayor Chelminiak said the City appreciates the work of the KCHA. Mr. Norman said they appreciate the partnership with Bellevue as well and look forward to continued efforts.

(c) Washington State Road Usage Charge Pilot Project

Joyce Nichols, Director of Intergovernmental Relations, introduced Reema Griffith, Executive Director for the Washington State Transportation Commission. The commission was charged with reviewing options to replace the gas tax and the State's reliance on the gas tax to fund road and infrastructure projects. With an increasing number of electric and hybrid vehicles, the revenues generated by the gas tax remain flat.

Ms. Griffith said the commission is appointed by the governor. Three members are from eastern Washington and four members are from western Washington. She noted the connection between the lack of affordable housing, which causes people to move farther from jobs, and the increasing traffic congestion and transportation needs. Washington has the second highest gas tax in the country at 49.4 cents per gallon. The money generated by the gas tax is reflected in the project list approved by the state legislature with the adoption of the tax rate. Those dollars are heavily leveraged through bonding. The current gas tax directs 11 cents per gallon to cities and counties for local road projects, and four cents contributes to repaying debt. Approximately eight cents per gallon is available for use on state highways, bridges, and ferries.

The state estimates that, by 2027, it will spend 70 percent of its gas tax revenues for debt payments. Ms. Griffith said fuel efficiency continues to increase, and the federal standard of 54.5 miles per gallon for vehicles is targeted for 2025. The current average fuel efficiency in Washington state is 20.5 miles per gallon. The U.S. Energy Information Administration predicts that new cars will achieve 48 miles per gallon by 2040, and all cars (new and old) will achieve 37 miles per gallon by 2040. Ms. Griffith noted that a number of car manufacturers intend to make only or mostly hybrid and electric vehicles by the mid-2020s. Conservative estimates

indicate that vehicles in Washington state will reach an average of 35 miles per gallon by 2035, which results in a 45 percent reduction in gas tax revenues.

Ms. Griffith said the road usage charge (RUC) is a potential solution for addressing the decrease in revenues. She said Oregon has been studying the approach since the early 2000s and is the only state that allows up to 5,000 residents to pay the per-mile charge in lieu of the per-gallon gas tax. In the RUC West consortium of 14 western states, eight states are conducting research, five states are testing the RUC approach, and Oregon has a legislatively enacted program.

A 25-member steering committee of the Washington State Transportation Commission began studying the RUC solution in 2012. The task force includes three commissioners, eight legislators, and representatives of auto and light truck manufacturers, environmental groups, counties, the trucking industry, cities, public transportation agencies, tribal agencies, the Washington State Department of Transportation, businesses, and the public.

Ms. Griffith said the revenues generated through the RUC pilot program are estimated to exceed gas tax revenues at a rate of 2.4 cents. She said Washington state is currently the largest per capita test in the country. Drivers would pay the gas tax or RUC, but not both, during the transition to a statewide RUC. Oregon's program initially asked drivers to install a device in their vehicles to track their mileage. However, that largely was not embraced by the public. Oregon concluded that it is important to have options that do not involve technology.

Ms. Griffith commented on the equity issue related to the gas tax, which is based on the fuel efficiency of vehicles. She said drivers of electric vehicles in Washington currently pay a \$150 electric vehicle registration fee, which is approximately half of what the typical driver pays in gas taxes. The gas tax would need to increase by approximately 1.5 cents per gallon per year on all vehicles between 2019 and 2043 to equal the revenues to be generated by a RUC of 2.4 cents per mile.

Maintaining the gas tax would keep funding at status quo levels and would not be sufficient to address the growing demand for transportation improvements and maintenance. Ms. Griffith described a comparison of the cost of the gas tax versus the RUC for a number of vehicle types. Less fuel efficient vehicles will see a decrease in the amount of taxes paid with the RUC, and more fuel efficient vehicles will experience an increase in their amount of taxes. The overall outcome is that all drivers will pay the same rate to use the road, regardless of the vehicle's miles per gallon. Ms. Griffith said environmental groups have expressed concern that the tax will discourage fuel efficient vehicles. However, the steering committee concluded that traditional gas vehicles are still more expensive to own due to the cost of gas and maintenance. Depending on policy priorities, decision-makers could choose to adjust the RUC rate based on specific factors including vehicle miles per gallon, vehicle weight, engine type, and fuel source.

Ms. Griffith said the state RUC pilot program will test potential mileage reporting methods, privacy and data protection, and interoperability with other states and Canada. The steering committee will formulate a recommendation to forward to the state legislature for a decision on the findings. Additional issues to be considered by the legislature include potential revenue allocations to local jurisdictions and State Constitution 18th Amendment implications.

The one-year RUC pilot program was initiated in February and involves 2,000 volunteer test vehicles. The program includes the only cross-border testing in the country and involves the City of Surrey in British Columbia, the Idaho Transportation Department, and the Oregon Department of Transportation. Additional partners are the Seattle Electric Vehicle Association and Plug-in America.

The mileage reporting options included in the program are a mileage permit, odometer charge, automated mileage meter, and a smartphone application. Ms. Griffith highlighted the characteristics of each option. The pilot program participants chose reporting options as follows: 1) plug-in device with GPS, 34 percent; 2) odometer reading, 29 percent; 3) plug-in device without GPS, 21 percent; 4) smartphone app, 15 percent; and 5) mileage permit, one percent. Participants in the pilot program are located throughout the state. The pilot program will conclude in early 2019, and the final report will be forwarded to the state legislature, governor, and U.S. Department of Transportation by January 2020.

Councilmember Robertson thanked Ms. Griffith for the presentation and requested an update upon the completion of the pilot program. Ms. Robertson said she would ultimately like the Council to adopt a policy position for transmittal to the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) as part of the agency's regional transportation planning. She expressed concern regarding the loss of the City's share of gas tax revenues.

Ms. Robertson said the 18th Amendment of the State Constitution states that gas tax revenues can be used only for highway purposes. She noted that the carbon tax on the ballot this fall will add 14 cents per gallon the first year and will increase annually. Those funds will not be restricted to transportation purposes and the tax will be in addition to the gas tax or proposed RUC.

Councilmember Robertson noted additional concerns regarding: 1) the unpredictability of quarterly RUC bills, which makes it harder for individuals to budget, 2) the time and effort required of individuals (e.g., tracking usage, saving gas receipts for a credit), 3) privacy issues, 4) search and seizure issues related to capturing data about drivers, 5) the equity impacts for mid- to low-income drivers, and 6) the impact on service businesses (i.e., plumbers, electricians, and others who drive as a part of their workday). Ms. Robertson said she would be interested in data from the pilot program regarding the economic impact on small businesses. She would prefer to increase the gas tax, which is less expensive and more straightforward to collect, and to continue to charge a fee for electric vehicles.

Ms. Griffith said the data is captured by a third party vendor/insurance company if a participant uses their app, and not by the state. Drivers will not be required to use that type of service and may opt to receive only the bill from the state, which does not capture or maintain any additional data. Regarding equity, Ms. Griffith said the gas tax applies equally to all drivers. However, a RUC program gives the legislature the ability to provide discounts based on income and/or car type. Ms. Griffith noted that small businesses will likely pay less through a RUC than the gas tax, especially for larger vehicles that are less fuel efficient.

Councilmember Zahn said she appreciated the detailed presentation. Responding to Ms. Zahn, Ms. Griffith confirmed that the state would need to significantly increase the gas tax over time to

maintain status quo revenues as vehicles become increasingly fuel efficient and drivers choose hybrid and electric vehicles. In further response to Ms. Zahn, Ms. Griffith said she will follow up with information regarding the demographics of the 2,000 participants in the pilot program.

Ms. Zahn said she wants to ensure that RUC collections could be used only for transportation purposes. She shares Councilmember Robertson's concerns regarding privacy issues related to the collection of data.

[Councilmember Robertson left the meeting at 9:03 p.m.]

Deputy Mayor Robinson asked about options for efficiencies to reduce the overhead cost of operating a RUC program, including the usage of road tolling points to record mileage. Ms. Griffith noted that the state legislature could consider options for streamlining operations. Ms. Robinson suggested the potential for providing free Wi-Fi along highways. She expressed an interest in staff developing a set of recommended policies for the Council to consider, including recommendations for protecting Bellevue residents' privacy.

Mayor Chelminiak noted the I-5 smart highway project and suggested that perhaps it could be combined with the concept of Wi-Fi for transmitting data.

Councilmember Nieuwenhuis asked whether alternatives to the RUC were considered or studied. Ms. Griffith said there has been limited discussion about other options. However, there is no clear best solution, and none of them collect the level of revenues generated by the gas tax. Responding to Mr. Nieuwenhuis, Ms. Griffith said the RUC approach is consistent with the projected increase in the use of autonomous vehicles in terms of technology and revenue sustainability.

Mr. Nieuwenhuis would like the Council to develop a policy position on the RUC. He shares Councilmember Robertson's concerns regarding privacy and security. He recalled a 2013 report that referred to "social purposes" and the steering committee's objective to reduce the amount of driving. He observed that less driving equates to lower revenues. Ms. Griffith noted a state mandate to reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT), which also reduces greenhouse gas emissions. She acknowledged that some have argued that miles traveled is less important as the use of electric and more fuel efficient vehicles increases, and she concurred that fewer miles conflicts with the RUC solution for generating revenue.

Councilmember Stokes said that taxes are needed for transportation projects and can be collected in a number of ways, including the RUC. He thanked Ms. Griffith for the information.

Councilmember Lee said he typically does not like taxes but he likes the RUC proposal, which he sees as revenue generation for an essential service. He said that paying for miles traveled is a fair and appropriate approach, especially as the use of gas vehicles continues to decrease.

Ms. Griffith noted that ongoing changes in technology will likely refine the implementation and operation of a future RUC program. She said the state legislature will continue to study the issue, including the steering committee's recommendation, and she does not anticipate that a solution

would be implemented for some time. She said other states are exploring and testing the RUC approach.

Mayor Chelminiak requested information on how the program meshes with the existing bonds for transportation projects. Ms. Griffith acknowledged that the bond market does not favor untested revenue sources. She said initial interest rates would not be as low as the bonds supported by the gas tax. However, if the program is implemented, the state would be able to demonstrate the stability of RUC revenue collections over time to achieve lower interest rates.

Mr. Chelminiak concurred with his colleagues' suggestions that the City Council develop a formal policy position. He said he would like Ms. Griffith to provide another update before the end of the pilot program to inform that policy discussion.

Mr. Chelminiak opined that the revenue generated through the RUC should be spent only on transportation projects. He noted that the 18th Amendment further limits the use of revenues to certain types of transportation projects. He said the state legislature could consider a constitutional amendment. He would like more flexibility in the use of the funds.

With regard to equity, Mayor Chelminiak said that every tax is a form of social engineering. He said the RUC is more fair in terms of social equity. However, it is not equitable in the selection of the type of vehicle that an individual chooses to drive. He likes the technology-based options for collecting the RUC. However, he would not want to use technology that tracks where and when someone is traveling.

Mayor Chelminiak thanked Ms. Griffith for the extensive information and discussion.

(d) Tree Canopy Assessment Results

Mac Cummins, Director of Community Development, introduced staff's presentation of the tree canopy assessment results.

Jennifer Ewing, Environmental Stewardship Program Manager, noted the two-page summary of the results as well as the full report in the meeting packet. She said Bellevue's tree canopy was 45 percent in 1986, 40 percent in 1999, and 36 percent in 2007. Following the 2007 study, an organization called American Forests recommended a tree canopy goal for Bellevue of 40 percent. That goal was later adopted into the Comprehensive Plan.

The recently completed study used 2017 data and was part of the regional assessment with the King Conservation District. Consistent methods were used throughout the region, including the use of LIDAR data and aerial imagery. The study documented Bellevue's land cover: 37 percent urban tree canopy, 40 percent impervious surfaces, and 28 percent in possible planting areas. Bellevue parks have an overall tree canopy coverage of 64 percent. The majority of the city's tree canopy is in suburban residential areas (65 percent), and 670 acres of tree canopy is needed to reach the 40 percent goal. She highlighted the tree canopy by neighborhood, noting that Bridle Trails and Lakemont have the highest percentages of tree canopy while the Downtown, BelRed, and Factoria areas have the lowest levels of tree canopy.

Ms. Ewing said the average tree canopy in the right-of-way is 24 percent and the average tree canopy for schools is also 24 percent. She said the possible planting area analysis would need to be further refined to analyze appropriate locations, especially in areas where a current use might be changed to accommodate tree plantings.

The overall tree canopy was 38 percent in 2007 and 37 percent in 2017. However, there were changes in the methodology used for those two assessments. For example, in 2007, park areas were classified as 100 percent tree canopy, while the same areas were classified as 95 percent tree canopy in the 2017 study. That change made it appear that the tree canopy decreased in city parks, which is not the case.

Ms. Ewing compared Bellevue's tree canopy (37 percent) to Kirkland (41 percent), Redmond (38 percent), and Seattle (28 percent), noting that the tree canopy in Newcastle, Sammamish, Mercer Island, and Issaquah ranges from 47 percent to 51 percent.

Next steps are to develop a plan for achieving the City's 40 percent tree canopy goal. Ms. Ewing said she expects that the tree canopy will be an issue through the neighborhood planning process as well.

Councilmember Stokes thanked staff for the presentation and expressed support for the regional approach to the tree canopy assessment. He said it is important to consider the existing urban canopy and how to keep it healthy and expanding. He expressed concern about tree removal by residents and suggested that the City might want to consider a Land Use Code amendment to address the issue. Mr. Stokes suggested that the neighborhood planning process include discussions about increasing the tree canopy in their neighborhoods.

Responding to Councilmember Zahn, Ms. Ewing said the tree canopy goal of 40 percent was recommended by American Forests, an urban forestry nonprofit organization, based on the best practices of similar cities. Ms. Ewing said staff will explore methods used by other cities to preserve and expand their tree canopies in the development of a tree canopy plan. Ms. Zahn recalled the removal of trees at certain schools in the past based on safety and security concerns. Responding to Ms. Zahn, Mr. Cummins said many developers are interested in preserving and/or providing trees in their developments.

Councilmember Nieuwenhuis thanked staff for their work and said he looks forward to the development of the tree canopy plan.

Councilmember Lee said he appreciated the data presenting the percentage of tree canopy by neighborhood. He said it is good to have a goal, and he encouraged focusing the City's efforts on areas with the greatest opportunity for tree plantings versus trying to achieve a 40 percent tree canopy uniformly across Bellevue.

Deputy Mayor Robinson referred to the neighborhood tree policy for the Bridle Trails area and said it would be helpful to see policy recommendations for other neighborhoods. She noted that views are important in certain areas as well, and residents might not want trees blocking the views.

Mayor Chelminiak observed that the tree canopy has essentially leveled out since the 1980s. He noted that the development of the Lakemont area between 1986 and 1999 resulted in a loss of trees. However, despite significant development over the past 10-12 years, Bellevue's overall tree canopy remained relatively stable.

5. Council Discussion of Upcoming Items: None.
6. Continued Oral Communications: None.

At 10:00 p.m., Mayor Chelminiak declared the meeting adjourned.

Kyle Stannert, CMC
City Clerk

/kaw