

CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION ITEM

SUBJECT

Adoption of the *Grand Connection Framework Plan*. Staff will also provide an update on the progress of the Wilburton Commercial Area planning initiative and Draft Environmental Impact Statement.

STAFF CONTACTS

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POLICY ISSUES

The Wilburton-Grand Connection planning initiative has been defined as a Council Priority. The Grand Connection seeks to enhance the City's vision of a memorable place by creating a unique aesthetic and urban experience for residents, visitors, and businesses. It will create new opportunities for public space while connecting existing open spaces and community assets from Downtown to Wilburton. The Wilburton Commercial Area planning initiative seeks to connect land use and community development policies to investments in transit and new infrastructure, while also serving as a companion effort to the Grand Connection Visioning process. *Add 3-4 supporting comprehensive plan policies:*

- **Policy S-WI-5.** Explore the potential for transit supportive land use designations for the area between I-405 and the BNSF corridor and NE 4th and NE 8th Street.
- **Policy S-WI-27.** Coordinate off-street biking and walking facilities with on-street walking and biking facilities to provide safe connections to destinations such as schools, parks, shopping, and transit service.

DIRECTION NEEDED FROM COUNCIL

ACTION



DIRECTION



INFORMATION ONLY



Staff will request the City Council adopt the *Grand Connection Framework Plan* as the guiding document for implementation and future refinement and study, and to initiate Comprehensive Plan amendments in support of the project. Staff will also update Council on the progress of the Wilburton Commercial Area planning initiative, including the emerging vision and priorities, and the major elements of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), to be released in early 2018. No Council action is required related to the Wilburton Commercial Planning initiative at the Study Session.

BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS

On December 7, 2015 City Council approved the work plan for the Wilburton-Grand Connection project. The Grand Connection is a Council priority initiative to establish a vision for a non-motorized corridor that connects from Meydenbauer Bay, through Downtown Bellevue, and to the Wilburton Commercial Area and Eastside Rail Corridor. The Grand Connection will serve as a unique and signature element to Bellevue's urban landscape and will create opportunities for a new land use and urban design vision for the Wilburton Commercial Area.

The visioning process for the Grand Connection began in April of 2016 with two distinct sequences as part of the scope of work. Sequence One focused on the existing infrastructure between Meydenbauer Bay Park and the Civic Center District, and Sequence Two focused on the crossing of Interstate 405 and its interface with the Wilburton Commercial Area and the Eastside Rail Corridor. The Wilburton Commercial Area Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) planning process began in January of 2017 and was preceded by an Urban Land Institute National Advisory Panel analysis in May of 2016.

Grand Connection Framework Plan Adoption

The draft *Grand Connection Framework Plan* was provided to Council and posted on the project websites for public review on June 19. Staff also provided presentations and attended open houses for several organizations, boards, commissions, and neighborhood meetings. The plan documents, the recommended concepts and improvements for the Grand Connection route, beginning at the intersection of 100th Avenue NE and Main Street and ending at the Civic Center District within Downtown Bellevue. The recommendations include the identity of the route, cohesive design strategies, the art and culture plan, and key public space improvements. An appendix plan for art and culture was also provided, much of which was incorporated in the overall plan.

The recommendations set forth in the *Grand Connection Framework Plan* establish a foundation for defining mobility and placemaking improvements that will enhance the livability, quality of life, and experience of Bellevue's downtown. Improvements to pedestrian and cyclist mobility, as well as innovative transportation alternatives, will enhance and expand connectivity while improving non-motorized transportation options. Improvements to placemaking and aesthetics will create forums for memorable public spaces and programming, while establishing an aesthetic character that will be unique and defining for the route. Combined, the recommendations will create the potential for profound change for Downtown and the Wilburton Commercial Area, by creating a memorable experience and defining feature of Bellevue's urban fabric for residents, businesses, and visitors.

The purpose of the plan is to provide a framework for additional studies, refinements, and implementation strategies for larger-scale improvements, as well as identify and plan for smaller-scale changes along the route. The plan is intended to ready the vision for implementation. During the review period of the draft framework plan staff provided a number of presentations and open houses to civic and neighborhood organizations including:

- Eastside Rail Corridor Open House
- Wilburton Hill Neighborhood Association annual picnic
- Visit Bellevue
- Meydenbauer Center Board of Directors
- Bellevue Planning Commission
- Bellevue Transportation Commission
- Bellevue Parks and Community Services Board

Announcements for the availability of the plan were sent to the subscribers of the project and city websites, including subscribers for related planning efforts. Announcements were also made on the City's social media outlets, and articles were published in various sources including *It's Your City*,

Access Bellevue, and multiple online forums. The plan has received nearly 2,500 views on the project and city websites.

Tonight, staff will request a motion to adopt the *Grand Connection Framework Plan* and to initiate amendments to the Comprehensive Plan. Following adoption staff will proceed with developing a work and implementation plan for future Grand Connection efforts. Sequence Two, which addresses the Interstate 405 crossing of the Grand Connection, and its interface with the Wilburton Commercial Area and Eastside Rail Corridor, will be evaluated as part of the Environmental Impact Statement for the Wilburton Commercial Area, and the alternatives will be presented in a companion report to the *Grand Connection Framework Plan*.

Wilburton Commercial Area

In October 2016 the Council appointed the Wilburton Commercial Area CAC to begin their work. The planning process is being guided by the Council Principles that were adopted on December 7, 2015 (Attachment B). In developing a future vision for the area, the Committee has discussed elements of land use, development guidelines, parks & open space, transportation, and urban design.

The Wilburton Commercial Area is currently engaged in a Council appointed, 15-member CAC process. They are considering elements related to land use, transportation, parks & open space, and urban design. The process is intended to capitalize on the unique assets in and around the Wilburton Commercial Area, as well as those forthcoming such as the Eastside Rail Corridor, East Link light rail, and the Grand Connection. Additionally, the study area's context between the high growth centers of Downtown and BelRed position the Wilburton Commercial Area to become Bellevue's next great urban neighborhood.

The emerging vision capitalizes on these opportunities to create a high energy center that engages and activates these new opportunities for connections and public space. Two online open house surveys, and an environmental impact statement (EIS) scoping open house were hosted to solicit feedback from the public to assist in crafting the vision. Additionally, staff has conducted outreach with neighboring communities and civic organizations as the visioning has continued to evolve. Three alternatives, including a No Action alternative are being considered as part of the draft EIS (DEIS).

Some of the key themes that have emerged as part of the process include:

- Well defined network of connectivity that create a more intimate urban experience.
- The Eastside Rail Corridor as a defining feature, embraced with active uses and connections to the Wilburton Commercial Area street grid.
- The creation of a significant node of activity that interfaces and embraces the Grand Connection.
- A character of innovation and creativity that embraces and complements the surrounding context of Downtown, Spring District, and the Global Innovation Exchange.
- A rich network of public open space, defined by a central civic space, smaller public plazas, enhanced natural amenities (Sturtevant Creek, wetland, etc.), and the Eastside Rail Corridor.
- Incorporation of historical urban design references of Wilburton's history, the Trestle, and the diverse cultural heritage of Bellevue.
- Respectful and graceful transitions to the Wilburton Hill neighborhood and Wilburton Hill Park.
- Diversity of housing typologies to encourage a diverse mix of residents of all ages.
- Emphasis on community oriented businesses, entrepreneurs, startups, and affordable housing.

The DEIS will evaluate the three alternatives regarding their impacts and potential mitigation on the natural environment, transportation, aesthetics, neighborhoods, and a number of other factors. It is anticipated that the DEIS will be released in January of 2018.

Tonight, staff will present the emerging concepts and themes for the Wilburton Commercial Area. These concepts have been a result of the CAC process that will inform the DEIS. The presentation is for information only and no action is requested.

OPTIONS

1. Adopt the *Grand Connection Framework Plan* as the guiding document for implementation and future refinement and study, and initiate Comprehensive Plan amendments in support of the project.
2. Amend the *Grand Connection Framework Plan*.
3. Provide alternative direction to staff.

RECOMMENDATION

Option 1

ATTACHMENTS

- A. Grand Connection Route Map
- B. Wilburton-Grand Connection Council Principles
- C. Letter from Cascade Bicycle Club
- D. Letter from Eastside Heritage Center
- E. Letter from Parks and Community Services Board

AVAILABLE IN COUNCIL DOCUMENT LIBRARY

- A. Grand Connection Framework Plan
- B. Grand Connection Art and Culture Plan