

City of
Bellevue



STAFF REPORT

DATE: April 8, 2021

TO: Chair Moolgavkar and Members of the Planning Commission

FROM: Michael Austin, AICP, LEED AP-ND, Senior Planner/Urban Designer, 452-4637
Community Development Department

Nick Whipple, Senior Planner, 452-4578
Development Services Department

SUBJECT: Public Hearing on a Land Use Code Amendment (LUCA) for Sequence One of the Grand Connection Guidelines and Standards, creating a new section 20.25A.175 in the Land Use Code (LUC). File No. 20-114098-AD.

I. BACKGROUND

A. Purpose of the Proposed LUCA

The Grand Connection Initiative is a City Council Priority to implement a major place-making feature that connects Meydenbauer Bay Park, through Downtown Bellevue to the Wilburton Area. This vibrant, people-focused route builds upon the City's existing Pedestrian Corridor and Major Public Open Space network, a hallmark of Downtown Bellevue that has been incrementally added to over the years.

In 2018, the City adopted the Grand Connection Comprehensive Plan Amendment (CPA), and changed the Urban Design and the Arts Element, and policies and maps in the City's Comprehensive Plan Downtown Subarea Plan to incorporate the Grand Connection. Specifically, the CPA included policies aimed at improving connectivity, establishing cohesive design strategies, and creating a vibrant cultural corridor that offers enjoyable and memorable experiences.

The Grand Connection route is separated into two sequences. Sequence One addresses the area from the intersection of 100th Avenue NE and Main Street to the east end of the Transit Center (NE 6th Street and 110th Avenue NE). Sequence Two addresses the area east of NE 6th Street and 110th Avenue NE and the crossing of Interstate 405 to the Wilburton Area and the Eastrail. The proposed LUCA addresses Sequence One and contains new guidelines and standards in LUC 20.25A.175, and revises and replaces the existing Pedestrian Corridor and Major Public Open Space Design Guidelines.

B. Proposed LUCA

The proposed LUCA will revise and replace the existing Pedestrian Corridor and Major Public Open Space Design Guidelines and amend LUC 20.25A to create section 20.25A.175 Grand Connection and Major Public Open Spaces. The new section streamlines provisions related to

the Grand Connection and is intended to be clearer and more user-friendly for reviewers, project teams, and the general public. A strike-draft of the proposed LUCA is provided as Attachment A.

The proposed LUCA includes general requirements that are applicable to the full length of Sequence One of the Grand Connection, including Major Public Open Spaces. The provisions are based on the existing requirements of LUC 20.25A.090.C.1-2, which the proposed LUCA amends for conformance and clarity. Provisions include requirements for 24-hour public access, maintenance, rules on temporary furnishings for businesses along the corridor, and clarification on the development allowances above and beneath the Grand Connection and Major Public Open Spaces. The proposed general requirements ensure that the Grand Connection remains accessible to the public every day, year-round. Maintenance and operation requirements are in place to ensure the Grand Connection remains clean, safe, and in a state of good repair for all members of the public to enjoy.

The proposed LUCA extends the Grand Connection route through Downtown Park and Old Bellevue and establishes a “room” for each block along the Grand Connection route to encourage a variety of context-specific experiences. This context-specific approach will preserve the unique character-defining elements of different rooms within the Grand Connection, such as Old Bellevue and Downtown Park while encouraging strategies that create a sense of identity for the whole corridor.

Consistent with the current LUC, the proposed LUCA includes the applicable review process for Grand Connection improvements and provisions for an interim Grand Connection, an option that is potentially available to phased projects.

The proposed LUCA includes both guidelines and standards for the Grand Connection to shape private development. Guidelines provide direction to design teams on how a project should be designed and allow flexibility in how guidelines are applied to a project. Standards are strict requirements or criteria that a project must meet. The new guidelines and standards supplement the existing requirements, standards, criteria, and guidelines provided in Part 20.25A LUC. Common Grand Connection guidelines and standards include paving, furnishings and lighting, ecological framework, integrated artistic elements, and the use of the signature Grand Connection Gold color.

Guidelines use the words “should” or “consider,” and typically describe a general outcome that projects must produce. Projects are always required to comply with guidelines, though there may be flexibility to achieve such compliance. The Grand Connection guidelines represent “best practices” in place-making and are intended to help further shape the route as a vibrant cultural corridor that offers enjoyable and memorable experiences.

Standards typically use the word “shall” or a clear directive “is required,” and are specific mandates. Projects must comply with every standard, with little or no flexibility. The Grand Connection standards establish minimum requirements to ensure a cohesive design strategy for Sequence One while promoting equitable and quality design.

This LUCA will also include “conformance amendments” to Part 20.25A to effectively integrate the proposed LUC section 20.25A.175 and ensure consistency with the broader Downtown Code. For ease of administration, the conformance amendments are necessary to resolve omissions and incorrect references resulting from the proposed LUC section.

II. REVIEW PROCESS

At the March 10 Study Session, the proposed Grand Connection Sequence One Guidelines and Standards LUCA was introduced to the Planning Commission for review and discussion. The Planning Commission raised comments and questions about the proposed LUCA and provided direction on the draft LUCA to further promote accessibility in the design guidelines.

On March 24, the Planning Commission held a second study session to continue discussions from the March 10 meeting and review the proposed conformance amendments to Part 20.25A. After discussion, the Planning Commission directed staff to schedule the required public hearing for April 28. Following the public hearing on April 28, the Planning Commission will be asked to make a recommendation for transmittal to the City Council for final action.

III. STATE ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT (SEPA)

The application for SEPA review was noticed together with the draft LUCA and the notice of application on March 4, 2021. The environmental review indicates no probability of significant adverse environmental impacts occurring as a result of the proposed LUCA. A Determination of Non-significance (DNS) is issued pursuant to the threshold determination requirements in WAC 197-11-310.

IV. PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Required Public Notice

The notice required for City Council Legislative Actions (Process IV) is governed by LUC 20.35.415 through 20.35.450. Notice of the LUCA application, including notice of the SEPA, was published in the Weekly Permit Bulletin on March 4, 2021, and availability of the Weekly Permit Bulletin was noticed in the Seattle Times. Notice of the Public Hearing and Final SEPA Threshold Decision was published in the Weekly Permit Bulletin on April 8, along with availability of this staff report.

Department of Commerce Notice

Pursuant to the Washington State Growth Management Act, proposed amendments to the LUC must be sent to the Washington State Department of Commerce to review and comment on the proposed amendments to the LUC. The required notice to the Department of Commerce and the initial draft LUCA were transmitted on March 17, 2021, and a copy of both documents is available for review in the code amendment file. The LUCA is identified by Commerce as ID_2021-S-2461. No comments have been received by Commerce as of the date of this report.

Enhanced Engagement

In addition to the requirements of LUC 20.35.415 *et seq* for City Council Legislative Actions, staff has provided enhanced engagement for this LUCA to include an online presence, testing of the draft LUCA with design teams working on active projects along the Grand Connection route, and focus group discussions with landscape architects, architects, and developers with property along the Grand Connection route.

Public Comments

As of the writing of this staff report, staff has received two email inquiries, seeking additional information and/or clarification on the proposed amendments.

V. DECISION CRITERIA

LUC 20.30J.135 establishes the decision criteria for an application to amend the text of the LUC. Those criteria, and the relationship of these proposed amendments to them, are discussed below:

A. The amendment is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan; and

Finding: The proposed LUCA is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan. The amendments are intended to extend the Grand Connection through Downtown Park and Old Bellevue, improve connectivity, establish cohesive design strategies, and create a vibrant cultural corridor that offers enjoyable and memorable experiences. The following Comprehensive Plan policies support the proposed code amendment:

UD-20.1: Support and encourage the development of the Grand Connection as a cultural corridor by designing and creating spaces for performance, installation, and temporary-based art and cultural installations.

UD-50.1: Employ design guidelines that promote a consistent aesthetic quality and urban experience for those who use the Grand Connection.

UD-69.1: Encourage the development of the Grand Connection vision to create a unique, defining, and signature experience for people walking, riding a bicycle, or using other compatible mobility options, recognizing that the pedestrian experience and pedestrian safety take precedence over other modes.

S-DT-81: Develop the Grand Connection as a unifying feature for Downtown Bellevue by siting buildings and encouraging uses that activate the corridor, and by incorporating design components that ensure accessibility.

S-DT-87: Provide a graceful multimodal connection through the unifying design features of the Grand Connection between Downtown Park, Old Bellevue and Meydenbauer Bay Park.

S-DT-45.1: Implement design components and wayfinding along the Grand Connection to create an accessible and intuitive multimodal connection for users of all abilities.

B. The amendment enhances the public health, safety or welfare; and

Finding: The amendment will enhance the public health, safety and welfare by advancing a City Council Priority to respond to opportunities for place-making through Downtown Bellevue. The amendments serve to enhance the LUC and establish regulations to implement the Comprehensive Plan.

- C. The amendment is not contrary to the best interest of the citizens and property owners of the City of Bellevue.

Finding: The amendment is not contrary to the best interests of citizens and property owners of the City. The public interest is generally identified in the Comprehensive Plan and the development regulations that implement the Comprehensive Plan. The proposed LUCA implements the Comprehensive Plan and the public interest is advanced through this proposal.

VI. RECOMMENDATION

Staff has concluded that the Grand Connection Sequence One Guidelines and Standards LUCA to establish a new section LUC 20.25A.175 and related amendments, as drafted in Attachment A, is consistent with the decision criteria required for adoption of amendments to the text of the LUC, pursuant to Part 20.30J LUC. Staff recommends that the Planning Commission direct staff to prepare the LUCA for recommendation to Council.

ATTACHMENTS:

- A. Proposed Grand Connection Sequence One Guidelines and Standards LUCA Strike-Draft