

CITY OF BELLEVUE  
BELLEVUE PLANNING COMMISSION  
STUDY SESSION MINUTES

April 26, 2023  
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall  
Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Commissioners Cálad, Goeppele, Malakoutian  
COMMISSIONERS REMOTE: Chair Ferris, Commissioner Brown  
COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Vice Chair Bhargava, Commissioner Morisseau  
STAFF PRESENT: Thara Johnson, Emil King, Kate Nesse, Brooke Brod,  
Department of Community Development; Matt McFarland,  
City Attorney's Office  
COUNCIL LIAISON: Councilmember Robertson  
GUEST SPEAKERS: None  
RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER  
(6:32 p.m.)

The meeting was called to order at 6:32 p.m. by Commissioner Malakoutian who presided.

2. ROLL CALL  
(6:32 p.m.)

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present with the exception of Vice Chair Bhargava and Commissioner Morisseau.

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA  
(6:34 p.m.)

A motion to approve the agenda was made by Commissioner Goeppele. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Cálad and the motion carried unanimously.

4. REPORTS OF CITY COUNCIL, BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS  
(6:35 p.m.)

Councilmember Robertson reported that Commissioner Malakoutian represented the Planning Commission at the April 24 City Council meeting during the study session on micro-apartments. The Council was unanimous in thanking the Commission for its work. The Council's discussion was very similar to the Commission's discussion relative to open space, parking and affordability. The Council directed the staff to bring back the micro-apartments with a couple of changes: reducing the size of the maximum to 300 square feet to true up with the multifamily tax exemption code; and making the change to the zero parking option to true up with the 45 percent of area median income affordability consistent with the multifamily tax exemption code. With

those revisions, if someone wants to have the zero parking and the multifamily tax exemption, the units will have to be truly affordable at the 45 percent of area median income level. The Council also directed staff to bring back information and options about open space on the property if there is none nearby.

Councilmember Robertson said the Council also received an update on the Comprehensive Plan periodic update, Wilburton, and the Affordable Housing Strategy. Given that the city is on track to exceed the ten-year goal for the number of affordable housing units, the Council will later in the year be revisiting the goal for affordable housing production with an eye on increasing it. The city has met with great success in the preservation of units, the most cost-effective way of creating long-term affordable housing.

The Council was presented with an in-depth memo about the actions taken by the state legislature relative to land use. HB-1110, which requires four-plex and six-plex developments, addresses the missing middle. Another bill passed that requires two ADUs per lot. The lot-splitting bill did not pass, and neither did the transit oriented development bill. It is good that the work to update the Comprehensive Plan is not too far along to consider those changes and impacts. One bill that passed requires an analysis of greenhouse gases emissions as part of the Comprehensive Plan, so that issue will be added to the document.

## 5. STAFF REPORTS (6:41 p.m.)

### A. Planning Commission Meeting Schedule

Comprehensive Planning Manager Thara Johnson took a few minutes to review the Commission's schedule of upcoming meeting dates and agenda items.

Thara Johnson added that a lunch and learn virtual event is planned for May 3 to delve into the survey results and how to navigate the dashboard. Another virtual event related to Comprehensive Plan updates in general and hosted by the PSRC is scheduled for later in the month of May; the event is geared toward Councilmembers and Planning Commission members.

## 6. ORAL AND WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS

### A. Oral Communications (6:45 p.m.)

Jonny Lu, a Newport Hills resident, noted being an employee of a climate technology company that focuses on using natural systems as a way to combat climate change. Climate change or global warming is generally not seen happening in a linear function, rather it happens more in a step-wise function. Now heading into an El Nino season, the result might be the next step up in the staircase. Trees serve specific functions relative to climate change. Households that have trees around them typically see energy consumption drop by roughly 30 percent for air conditioning, and 50 percent for heating. Tree canopy also helps to alleviate the pressure on storm water systems in that the leaves on the trees help to naturally disperse water up to 36 percent, and the roots also help with drainage. Finally, dense urban areas experience temperatures that are one or two degrees higher than the surrounding rural areas, and trees serve as natural air conditioners by providing shade and evaporating water.

Barbara Braun with People for Climate Action voiced support for the planning and policy

development that is underway, but stressed the need for additional focus and inclusion of the content needed to ensure achieving the Sustainable Bellevue goals for dramatically reducing greenhouse gases emissions from buildings and transportation. City leaders at all levels should lead the community in making a monumental culture shift from the status quo to the sustainable future envisioned by Bellevue. The Commission should espouse and role model the change needed to turn intentions into reality. The city can be set on the right path by requiring in policy and in writing by being specific about how to reduce greenhouse gases emissions by 50 percent by 2030 in buildings and the transportation system while also maintaining quality of life in Bellevue. The plans should require all commercial and residential projects, including affordable housing, redevelopment, retrofits and remodels, to comply with or implement the Sustainable Bellevue vision and goals. For example, all structures should be built or redeveloped to LEED platinum building standards. With the turn toward electrification, the plans should require the utility company offer programs to modulate peak electricity loads, such as variable rate schedules and demand response. For affordable housing, the city should provide incentives or subsidies to ensure that the building standards can be achieved in those units. All new housing should be proximate to transit. Commercial buildings, including the aquatic center, should include heat island mitigations such as green roofs on buildings and parking structures. It is urgent that the city's tree canopy be preserved by putting better tree ordinances in place as soon as possible, by requiring all plans to comply, in arrears if necessary, with new tree standards as of 2023. The city should also create a land use designation for parks and open space and eliminate the residential zoning designation that exists for parks currently, which makes it appear that all of the city's parks are available for residential development.

Alex Tsimerman began with a Nazi salute and called the Commissioners dirty crooks and damn Nazi Gestapo fascist pigs from an animal farm. The Council is acting very strange and cuts everybody off at ten speakers. For the last couple of meetings there have been people not allowed to speak because more than ten signed up to speak. In 2012 a case was filed against the Council and the city's defense cost a lot of money. A new case has been filed against the mayor and what amounts to a hate crime. Even if first to sign up to speak, the Council always calls the name last. The Council first hears from people on Zoom; they make no effort to appear in person and should not be given more privilege. The Commission should stop acting like degenerate idiots and ask the Council and Councilmember Robertson why they are acting as they are, like stupid freaking rats.

B. Written Communications  
(6:56 p.m.)

Thara Johnson noted having included in the Commission packets correspondence relating to the C-1 LUCA, climate issues, the Comprehensive Plan update, Wilburton, the tree canopy and the tree code.

7. PUBLIC HEARING – None  
(6:58 p.m.)

8. STUDY SESSION  
(6:58 p.m.)

A. Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update: Overview of Community Engagement and Draft Environmental Impact Statement Process

Senior Planner Dr. Kate Nesse said much as been accomplished since February 2022 relative to

the Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update. Phase 1, the envisioning phase, engaged with the community around their vision for the future of Bellevue. Phase 2a involved talking with the community about specific issues that might be in the growth alternatives. The growth alternatives being analyzed in the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) were drawn from the input of the community. In Phase 2b there were discussions with the community about some of the key decision points, primarily housing. Phase 2c will begin with the publishing of the EIS on April 27. The phase will involve looking at all of the analysis on the various growth alternatives. All of that work will lead into Phase 3 in which there will be engagement with the city's commissions and the community about specific policies.

At the Commission's meeting on May 10 staff will provide an introduction to the alternatives in the Draft EIS (DEIS). There will be a public comment period open from April 27 to June 12, then on the Commission's June 14 meeting there will be discussion of the different elements of a potential preferred alternative, and on June 28 the discussion will focus on the public comment and the preferred alternative. The Commission will ultimately recommend to the City Council a preferred alternative to be studied in the Final EIS (FEIS).

Dr. Kate Nesse said there is a lot of information to inform the preferred alternative and the growth strategy. The EIS is a major element, but also in the mix will be an economic analysis, an assessment of racially disparate impacts, and the community feedback.

The community engagement plan was approved by the Council when the Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update project was launched in February 2022. The plan has been followed closely with only a few adjustments made. There has been more engagement with community groups than was anticipated and that has been beneficial by allowing for engaging more with underrepresented groups.

Community Engagement Lead Brooke Brod noted having participated in designing and executing all of the public participation efforts. There have been communications with about 5000 community members, and there has been outreach targeted at underrepresented groups. A statistically valid survey of Bellevue residents was conducted earlier in the year, and a strategy team comprised of 45 representatives of the city's business community, non-profits and human services community, neighborhood representatives, arts and tourism, and non-profit and market-rate developers has been meeting for about nine months to provide perspective and subject matter expertise. Since the program was launched in February 2022 there have been 64 events, 14 of which were interactive workshops or open houses; 19 of which were tabling events key community locations or festivals; 14 of which were presentations given at the request of various community and neighborhood groups; and 17 were focused community discussions. About half of the events were specifically targeted to Bellevue's diverse and underrepresented communities, including youth, people living in emergency shelters, seniors and BIPOC-led organizations. Simultaneously there has been active and robust participation on the online engagement hub EngagingBellevue.com where some 1200 individuals have shared comments, provided feedback or asked questions.

With regard to the statistically valid survey, the city contracted with an outside research firm to talk specifically with Bellevue residents about issues under consideration in the Comprehensive Plan. There were 1152 respondents, and there were follow-up activities to reduce the nonresponse bias. The survey results are weighted across the key demographics of age, dwelling type, ownership and income. The goals of the survey were to understand how residents would prioritize key planning goals; understand their attitudes toward new housing development; and understand the types of housing, amenities and features people would like to see in their

neighborhoods.

The first part of the survey looked at development priorities. A list of priorities drawn from previous community engagement activities and the city's overall goals were put forward, and three that rose to the top were home ownership opportunities affordable at different income levels; preserving and enhancing Bellevue's tree canopy; and general walkability.

Using the survey results, it is possible to dig into the differences and similarities across different demographic groups. A strong similarity can be found around priority for home ownership opportunities at different income levels; it was the top priority among a number of different income bands. Key differences of opinion are often seen in terms of age. In that respect, preserving the size and scale of the existing suburban neighborhoods is a top priority for some older residents, but is much lower on the scale for residents under the age of 30.

The survey sought responses concerning attitudes toward new housing development, including townhomes, apartments and condominiums. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of support for new housing throughout the city, and their level of support to see new housing development in their neighborhoods. Overall, strong support for new housing throughout the city was expressed. There also was a small majority of support for new housing development in people's particular neighborhoods. Younger respondents were significantly more supportive of seeing new housing development, both throughout Bellevue and in their neighborhoods, while older residents and homeowners showed a reduced level of support for that kind of new housing development anywhere in the city. The survey results can be parsed by neighborhood area, thus it can be seen that residents in BelRed, Crossroads, Downtown and Wilburton are the most supportive of seeing new housing development in their neighborhood, and the residents of Newport, Somerset and West Bellevue were the least supportive of seeing new housing development in their neighborhoods.

Continuing, Brooke Brod said one interesting part of the survey is an exercise in which people were invited to think about the characteristics that make up their ideal neighborhood. They were presented with a series of neighborhood designs based on five attributes, with different options under each attribute, such as mix of housing types, different levels of access to business, different styles of parks and street design, and options for affordable housing. Not surprisingly, the two attributes that primarily drove the decisions of the respondents were the mix of housing types and access to businesses and services. The respondents clearly prioritized variety of neighborhood types to meet specific needs. About half of Bellevue's land is currently zoned for single family residential neighborhoods so it can be concluded that the market is not able to provide some of the other neighborhood types shown to be of high interest to many of the respondents.

Commissioner Malakoutian noted having attended some of the community meetings and remarked that they were very well managed.

Commissioner Goepple asked if the EIS analysis will include the positive impacts associated with higher density, such as easing pressures on surrounding natural or low-density areas. Dr. Kate Nesse said the scope of the EIS does not include impacts to areas outside of the city. That is not to say such impacts are unimportant.

Chair Ferris praised the staff for the work done, especially the outreach efforts and the ways in which the work has been pulled together. The comparison of how the different age groups felt about their neighborhoods was of particular interest. In approaching the Comprehensive Plan

update, the youth in particular should be kept in mind given that they will be the ones most impacted.

Commissioner Brown agreed that the younger generation often has different viewpoints, and also agreed that it will be critical to keep their priorities in mind. Nimbyism is real, but it is not a majority of the community members as evidenced in the fact that the majority of respondents indicated a need for more housing throughout the city and in their own neighborhoods. Brooke Brod pointed out that the respondents who did not support more housing in their neighborhood, or who had questions about new housing development, were given the option of giving their opinion about where additional housing would be appropriately located. Overall, the residents were clearly thoughtful in commenting about where it would be appropriate to accommodate additional growth outside of their neighborhoods.

Commissioner Malakoutian praised the effort to reach out to underrepresented communities but questioned why that included people who do not work in Bellevue. Brooke Brod said the work recognized the viewpoints of people who come to Bellevue to work or shop, some of whom may want to live in Bellevue in the future. One critical way of reaching out to those people directly and to understand their input broadly was through the strategy team, which had representatives from the business, non-profit, human services, hospitality and other communities. Bellevue's Comprehensive Plan impacts residents as well as workers, visitors and business owners. Surveys and studies conducted by the Puget Sound Regional Council were also digested to gauge what people in other jurisdictions are thinking. Dr. Kate Nesse added that Bellevue currently has some 65,000 housing units, and the housing target aims to add another 35,000 by 2044, which by definition means that a third of the population in 2044 will be those who do not live in Bellevue currently.

With regard to the work to reach out to the underrepresented communities, Brooke Brod said the cultural outreach assistants specifically reached out to the Chinese, Latinx and South Asian communities. The outreach assistants are tasked with building relationships with key community groups. There has been great collaboration with teachers in the school district to engage with youth in the classroom, and there has been a strong partnership with Bellevue Youth Link. As people register for events, an online platform is used that allows people to optionally share demographic information.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Malakoutian about what is meant by the term "statistically valid" in regard to the survey results, Dr. Kate Nesse explained that the intent of the survey was to be representative of Bellevue's residents as a whole. Therefore, the responses represent not just the opinions of those who participated in the survey. No tests have been done to determine if the differences in specific priorities are statistically significant.

Commissioner Cálad noted that the 1150 people who participated in the survey represent less than one percent of the population of Bellevue and asked how that can be said to be representative of the community. Dr. Kate Nesse said the thing that makes a survey representative is the random draw from the population. That draw will have characteristics of age, income and homeowner status. The one percent of the population randomly drawn is very likely to be a microcosm of the larger population.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Malakoutian about the estimate of interaction with 5000 people, Dr. Kate Nesse allowed that it cannot be said with perfect certainty exactly how many people were directly communicated with. There likely was some overlap of those who responded to the survey and those who showed up at an event. Overall, about 5000 people

responded to the survey, attended an event, stopped at a table, heard a presentation, or interacted in some way with the city around the Comprehensive Plan.

Dr. Kate Nesse said the draft EIS that will be released on April 27 will include an analysis of the environmental impacts for three potential scenarios for meeting the growth targets. Release of the document triggers a 45-day public comment period.

Dr. Kate Nesse shared that three of the major areas requiring updates in the Comprehensive Plan are equity, housing and climate change. Equity means that a person's identity does not predict personal and social outcomes like income or health. From the community feedback, it is known that access to housing is out of reach for a lot of people. In the vision survey, the major thing highlighted as something the city is doing a bad job of addressing was providing housing that meets the needs of a wide variety of people. Housing access impacts a lot of different demographics in a variety of ways. Access to housing is therefore an equity issue.

The community also pointed out that the city is not implementing equity. In the vision survey nearly half the respondents indicated the city is doing a poor job in creating an equitable community in which everyone can thrive. Hispanic respondents rated the city even worse. Additionally, low-income residents of the city often feel overlooked. About a fifth of households in Bellevue make less than \$50,000 annually and the housing needs of people in that group can be difficult to meet. As a group they often feel left out. Bellevue is thought of as a wealthy city and it is easy to forget that many people do not have access to that wealth.

One thing found in the statistically valid survey was that people want and need a lot of different kinds of neighborhoods. One thing that came up repeatedly was that people do not like the big houses. It was also heard that home ownership is a top priority in both the statistically valid survey and in the vision survey. In the housing forums and in all discussions about home ownership, the concerns voiced are both immediate and for the future of those who are currently children and those who will soon retire.

The survey data indicates that some places in the city are more suited to middle housing. Some neighborhoods voiced a lot of support for additional housing options and for middle housing options in particular. There is support for dense housing options in the more dense areas, and there is support for lower density housing options like duplexes and triplexes in the less dense areas.

With regard to climate change, about half of the greenhouse gases emissions come from heating and cooling buildings. The other half comes from transportation. People are interested in buildings and in transportation for a variety of reasons, not just in terms of climate change. Preserving the tree canopy was highlighted as important for in terms of aesthetics and health. Reducing greenhouse gases emissions was held up as something that should be a policy focus for the city. There is a lot of support for safety in terms of walking, biking and using transit. More than half of the respondents reported having walked, biked or used transit once a week or more over the previous year, and a clear desire was voiced about wanting safe sidewalks and bike lanes, and the ability to access third places in their neighborhoods in ways that are easy and safe.

Chair Ferris said the work that has been done has been transformational. With regard to the tree canopy, the need to preserve as much of it as possible was stressed. There will, however, also need to be a balance struck between preserving the tree canopy while developing new housing through approaches such as requiring greater setbacks in exchange for more height. Dr. Kate Nesse said the Comprehensive Plan sets direction. The technical details, such as setbacks and

height, are addressed in the code. Incentives that promote the retention of trees and the creation of green space is policy direction that is appropriate for inclusion in the Comprehensive Plan.

Commissioner Cálad returned to the comments offered by the Hispanic community about being felt left out and asked for more details. Dr. Kate Nesse allowed that Spanish is the second most spoken non-English language after Chinese. The city does a lot of translation into Spanish, but most who think about Bellevue reference the large Asian population instead. Brooke Brod said for many the issue comes down to the increasing cost of living. Even those who have lived in Bellevue for decades are feeling the general cost of living pressures. Those with English as a second language do not always understand what options or services are available to them. While data is easy to collect and present, it is not always easy to extrapolate why someone feels what they feel. There is a clear desire to see more cultural representation in the city, like celebrations of Hispanic culture and more opportunities for purchasing culturally appropriate goods.

Commissioner Goepple agreed with the need to strike a balance between density and the environment, and added having been struck by the comments about safety in relation to climate change. There clearly is an aspiration that Bellevue will have a lot of people out walking and biking, but many will say as things stand Bellevue is not a well-designed city and does not accommodate safe walking and biking. The feedback in that regard is spot on and should be heeded. Brooke Brod said another aspect often heard about is the desire for more opportunities to use public transit in terms of safe and convenient weather-protected bus stops and safe routes to and from those bus stops. There is a general recognition that not everyone will be able to give up a hundred percent of the car trips for various valid reasons, but there is also a clear interest in reducing the overall number of those car trips by replacing them with some other mode.

Commissioner Malakoutian asked if the survey separated the issues of walking and biking. Dr. Kate Nesse said biking was not addressed in the survey separate from walking. There is data from the American Communities Survey about the number of people who bike to work but not about biking for recreation around the city.

## 9. OTHER BUSINESS (7:57 p.m.)

### A. Remote Participation Approval

A motion to approve remote participation on May 10 by Commissioners Morisseau and Malakoutian was made by Commissioner Brown. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Cálad and the motion carried unanimously.

## 10. APPROVAL OF MINUTES (7:58 p.m.)

### A. April 12, 2023

Commissioner Goepple called attention to the last paragraph on Page 6 and the motion to approve as amended the Affordable Housing Strategy Action C-1 Phase 2 LUCA. The minutes are not clear as to what is meant by “as amended.” The suggestion was made to add a parenthetical to indicate the Commission chose Option B and replaced “and” with “or” relative to access to transit and arterial access as part of the criteria.

Thara Johnson agreed to work on the language and bring it back for approval at the next meeting.



There was consensus to table approving the minutes until the next meeting.

#### 11. CONTINUED ORAL COMMUNICATIONS (8:01 p.m.)

Saghar Amini voiced appreciation for the survey and the work that has been done, as well as for the great questions asked by Commissioner Malakoutian, but noted having wished to hear that there had been input from more than just the leaders of various groups giving their assumptions of the challenges faced by those who work and live in Bellevue. Nothing was said about Bellevue College and input from its students who are likely to live and work in Bellevue.

Lee Sargent, 16246 NE 24<sup>th</sup> Street and president of the Sherwood Forest Community Club, commented that those who respond to surveys often say what they are thinking at the moment. The reality is that when it comes down to actually implementing policies is the time where the residents say what they really think. The important thing to keep in mind is the need to get people involved as things are happening and where it is happening. When putting buildings and things in place, there must always be consideration given to what will happen to the trees. More buildings usually means more impermeable surfaces like sidewalks, and if the buildings are located too close together, tall trees cannot survive.

Alex Tsimerman noted being a candidate to the moon and after offering a Zieg Heil with calling the Commissioners dirty crooks and damn Nazi fascist pigs from an animal farm. Bellevue is the first city in America to invite people of minorities, something that is both stupid and dangerous. People who come from Calcutta or Shanghai are slaves. Key to everything is economics. The slaves that have come from different countries have slave mentalities. They all elect Democrats. It is the mentality of slaves. Live free or die is not for them, that is an American principle. They elect Councilmembers who are all Democrats, which is an idiotic situation because the Democrats make life miserable for the very people who elect them. It cannot be understood why all the idiots are doing what they do and why the slaves never elect people who will work for them. They only elect people who are working against them.

Commissioner Goeppele took a moment to have the record reflect that the last speaker's comments do not reflect the city of Bellevue. The racist comments, and comments that are based on Nazi salutes, do not represent 99.99 percent of the city's residents, all of whom want to come to Bellevue and have a constructive dialog about the future of the city.

Commissioner Cálad added that what makes Bellevue great are those who come from other countries. They are not slaves, rather they are citizens who love the city and who want to be active participants in building a community that cares for its residents regardless of age or race. It is a wonderful and powerful feeling to be part of a group that is allowed to express opinions without resorting to insults to make a point.

Judith Mercado commented on having had the honor and privilege of growing up in Bellevue, having moved to the city from Mexico at the age of three, and noted being proud to be a first-generation Latina who got to obtain a higher education. The Hispanic community in Bellevue, however, is suffering due to housing issues. As someone who works with Bellevue youth through Youth Eastside Services, it was stated that mental health is a priority. Housing is a main topic for many families. Rents continue to increase and bills continue to rise. Many must work more than one job to continue living in Bellevue. High rents and a high cost of living does not offer much of a future for Bellevue's young residents. Growing up in Bellevue, very little

diversity was seen in the Bellevue School District staff, but that has changed and it is inspiring.

Tina Morales, 16604 SE 7<sup>th</sup> Street, thanked the Commissioners for the work they are doing and for the critical questions being asked. As a resident of the same house for the last 15 years, it is clear that if things continue as they are, members of the Latino community will soon no longer be able to afford to live in Bellevue. Having arrived in the United States at the age of 10, it is a proud thing to have been the first family member to graduate from college. Having grown up in a house, it was different to come to the United States and have to move into an apartment. In time it became possible to once again live in a house, and that brought with it confidence. It is not that apartments lead to problems, rather it is that housing can lead to confidence.

12. EXECUTIVE SESSION – None  
(8:19 p.m.)

13. ADJOURNMENT  
(8:19 p.m.)

A motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Goepple. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Cálad and the motion carried unanimously.

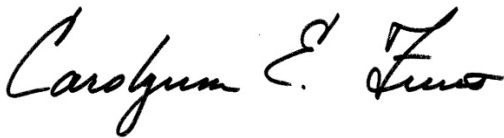
Commissioner Malakoutian adjourned the meeting at 8:19 p.m.



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Thara Johnson  
Staff to the Planning Commission

May 11, 2023  
Date



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Carolynn Ferris  
Chair of the Planning Commission

May 11, 2023  
Date