

CITY OF BELLEVUE
CITY COUNCIL

Summary Minutes of Regular Meeting

January 14, 2025
6:00 p.m.

Council Chambers
Bellevue, Washington

PRESENT: Mayor Robinson, Deputy Mayor Malakoutian and Councilmembers Hamilton, Lee, Nieuwenhuis, Stokes and Zahn

ABSENT: None.

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:04 p.m., with Deputy Mayor Malakoutian presiding.

2. Roll Call; Flag Salute

City Clerk Charmaine Arredondo called the roll and all Councilmembers except Mayor Robinson were present.¹ Councilmember Hamilton led the flag salute.

(a) Martin Luther King, Jr., Day Proclamation

Councilmember Hamilton read the proclamation recognizing January 20, 2025, as Martin Luther King, Jr., Day in Bellevue. He urged everyone to reflect on Dr. King's legacy, join in MLK Day events, engage in acts of service and to visit MLKDay.gov for opportunities to contribute to your community.

Dr. Shirley Jenkins, Bellevue Alumnae Chapter President, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., accepted and thanked the Council for the proclamation. She said it is a public recognition of the shared vision, heritage, achievements and positive impact of Dr. King's work and influence that continues to this day. She said the proclamation strengthens the pride of the Bellevue Alumnae Chapter related to service in the community and encourages further positive action. She thanked City staff and Crossroads Mall for working with them to provide the Martin Luther King, Jr., Day health fair and to raise awareness about important health issues that impact everyone.

(b) National Human Trafficking Awareness Month Proclamation

Councilmember Lee read the proclamation recognizing January 2025 as National Human Trafficking Awareness Month in Bellevue. He urged everyone to join in the fight against human

¹ Mayor Robinson arrived during the reading of the first proclamation.

trafficking by raising awareness, supporting survivors and promoting a culture of vigilance and advocacy to end this violation of human rights.

Constance Slappey, Assistant Police Chief, said the Bellevue Police Department takes human trafficking extremely seriously and wants the community to feel safe. On behalf of Chief of Police Wendell Shirley and the entire department, Assistant Chief Slappey thanked the Council for its support and for the proclamation.

(c) Korean American Day Proclamation

Councilmember Zahn read the proclamation recognizing January 13, 2025 as Korean American Day in Bellevue to honor and celebrate the contributions and cultural influences of Korean Americans in our community and the region.

3. Approval of Agenda

→ Councilmember Lee moved to approve the agenda, and Councilmember Stokes seconded the motion.

→ The motion carried by a vote of 7-0.

4. Oral Communications

City Clerk Arredondo said the total time for oral communications is for a period not to exceed 30 minutes and topics must relate to City of Bellevue government. Persons speaking to items on the agenda will be called first and if time remains, others will be called. The presiding officer is authorized to give preference to individuals who have not spoken to the Council within the past 60 days or who are speaking to items that will come before the Council in the upcoming 60 days.

(a) Joe Kunzler said he emailed a recommendation to the Council regarding the Open Public Meetings Act (OPMA) and public comments that attack Washingtonians' race, religion, culture, national origin, sexual orientation, gender expression and mental or physical disabilities. He said the Council should have the power to exclude Alex Tsimerman for 366 days for his comments during Council meetings. He noted that Mr. Tsimerman alleged at the Kirkland City Council meeting that Mr. Kunzler has Down Syndrome. Mr. Kunzler said he does not but he has Asperger Syndrome, and the two conditions are very different. Mr. Kunzler thanked Councilmembers for their public service.

(b) Alex Tsimerman, President of StandUp America, expressed his ongoing concerns regarding the Bellevue Police Commission and the City Council.

(c) Tika Smith, Founder and President of BAWSE (Brilliantly Awesome Women Support Each Other), said she is also an adult Bellevue Youth Link Board Member. She shared information regarding her first children's book, Emily Empowered. She thanked Mayor Robinson for her leadership and advocacy for Bellevue families and communities and said Ms. Robinson has been an inspiration to her. She thanked Mayor Robinson for her

commitment to making Bellevue a place where everyone can thrive. Ms. Smith thanked Councilmembers for their public service and continued efforts to foster a supportive and inclusive community.

- (d) Lee Sargent said he appreciated that, regardless of what the City is faced with, Councilmembers have diligently strived to do their best for the community. He thanked them for the ongoing efforts despite having to deal with unpleasant situations at times.
- 5. Reports of Community Councils, Boards, and Commissions: None.
- 6. Report of the City Manager: None.
- 7. Council Business and New Initiatives: None.
- 8. Consent Calendar
 - Deputy Mayor Malakoutian moved to approve the Consent Calendar, and Councilmember Lee seconded the motion.
 - The motion to approve the Consent Calendar carried by a vote of 7-0, and the following items were approved:
 - (a) Ordinance No. 6830 authorizing and providing for the acquisition of interests in land for the purpose of constructing the 150th Avenue SE/SE 37th Street/I-90 EB off-ramp Project (CIP Plan No. PW-R-212); providing for condemnation, appropriation, taking of land and property rights necessary therefore; providing for payment; directing the initiation of appropriate proceedings in the manner provided by law for said condemnation; and establishing an effective date.
- 9. Public Hearings: None.
- 10. Study Session
 - (a) Bellevue School District Update

City Manager Diane Carlson introduced the update regarding the Bellevue School District.

Dr. Kelly Aramaki, Bellevue School District Superintendent, commended local teachers for their extensive efforts during the pandemic, including visiting students and delivering materials to their homes. He said Bellevue high schools were rated in the top 30 best high schools in the state for 2023-2024 by U.S. News and World Report.

Dr. Aramaki said the school district offers language learning in Arabic, Hindi, Korean, Mandarin, Spanish and Japanese. They also have plans to offer American Sign Language in the future. He described Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs in maritime welding,

construction, horticulture, cybersecurity, nursing, theater, technical skills and costume design, and culinary skills.

Dr. Aramaki described the school district's efforts related to environmental sustainability. He noted that the new Puesta del Sol Elementary School is the first net zero school building in the state and it produces more energy than it can consume. Noting innovations in rocketry and robotics, Dr. Aramaki said the Newport High School team came in second in the 2022 International Rocketry Competition and all Bellevue high schools have a robotics team.

The Bellevue School District offers online learning for any student in the state and students receive a BSD diploma. Students may enroll in all classes including Advanced Placement (AP) and global languages. Dr. Aramaki said a new Parent Partnership Program will be launched in Fall 2025 to partner with parents who homeschool their children.

Dr. Aramaki said K-12 enrollment has increased since 2022 and school funding is based on a minimum enrollment of 400 students per school. Thirteen of Bellevue's 16 elementary schools have more than 400 students. He said there are more students in middle school and high school than in elementary schools. The school district previously considered consolidating middle schools. However, that option is currently on hold and likely will not happen as enrollment has stabilized. A number of 11th and 12th graders attend the full-time Running Start program at Bellevue College.

Dr. Aramaki noted that 120 students live in the new Polaris at Eastgate affordable and workforce housing. He said there might be opportunities for using BSD property for workforce housing for nurses, teachers, fire fighters and others.

Dr. Aramaki commented regarding public school funding in Washington state. He noted gaps in state funding for special education, transportation, and materials, supplies and operating costs (MSOC). Since 2020, the funding gaps have cost the BSD \$167 million. Dr. Aramaki said the BSD is not competing with other school districts but rather with private schools. He said local levy dollars help to sustain the school district. However, 2023-2024 expenditures exceeded total revenues. He said the Bellevue School District was recognized by Niche for having the top schools in the state.

Councilmember Stokes thanked Dr. Aramaki for his leadership and for the presentation. Mr. Stokes said he is impressed with how the community is coming together to address challenges. He said he has observed an evolution in which the City and school district have enhanced their partnership with each other and the community. Councilmember Stokes asked how the City can help the school district as it experiences increasing funding gaps and needs.

Dr. Aramaki said it starts with building relationships. He said he enjoyed traveling to Washington, D.C., with two of the Councilmembers. He said partnering to support early learning and families is critical. He believes there are opportunities for the school district and the City to fund certain needs. He said the school district is limited on what it can spend.

John Harrison, Chief of Staff, BSD, noted a recent meeting with members of the Bellevue School Board, City Council and City staff. He said that while that was the first time he recalled that type of meeting, City and school district staff have been working together for years, including in the area of affordable housing. He said the Bellevue Police Department and Bellevue Fire Department work closely with the schools and Human Services Division staff work with school district staff. He believes there are additional opportunities for partnerships.

Councilmember Zahn concurred with the importance of working with both students and families. She said it was good to see the increased enrollment. She expressed support for career and technical education programs. She expressed an interest in partnering with the school district in the area of workforce housing. She asked about the strategy for the school district to address the current budget shortfall.

Dr. Aramaki said the current budget gap is \$10 million and a shortfall of \$16 million is anticipated for the next school year. He said \$16 million is the equivalent of 91 staff members and 85 percent of the district's budget is salaries. He said the school district is currently working to reduce expenditures. He said the district aggressively staffed schools coming out of the pandemic to keep class sizes down and to address increased needs, including in the areas of mental health and family support. Councilmember Zahn concurred with the need for increased mental health resources for students and their families.

Councilmember Nieuwenhuis commented on Mr. Tsimerman's antisemitic hand gestures during the meeting, which he sees as disruptive as verbal outbursts. Mayor Robinson said she consulted with the City Attorney, who informed her that the behavior does not meet the legal criteria for prohibited behavior.

Mr. Nieuwenhuis thanked Dr. Aramaki for the presentation and expressed support for the school district as it continues to address its challenges. Councilmember Nieuwenhuis said he looks forward to enhanced collaboration between the City and school district. He expressed support for the career and technical education and said he was pleased to hear about the partnership program with parents who homeschool their children.

Councilmember Nieuwenhuis asked whether the level of out-of-district students is sustainable. He asked whether the district has considered bringing back School Resource Officers (SROs). He said he has heard interest from the community in a longer lunch period for students.

Dr. Aramaki said he believed that out-of-district students are sustainable in terms of stabilizing, but not significantly growing, enrollment. He said the number of out-of-district students is likely to increase when light rail service expands.

Regarding SROs, Dr. Aramaki said he loves seeing Chief of Police Wendell Shirley in the schools and the students gravitate toward him. While there is no longer a SRO program, there are strong relationships between schools and Bellevue police. Dr. Aramaki said school safety is a top priority and the overall focus is on secure buildings, adequately trained staff and attention to mental health concerns.

Dr. Aramaki acknowledged that some parents do advocate for a longer lunch period. However, it is important that it not go too long because things can get out of hand. He noted his previous experience as a elementary school teacher and principal. Mr. Harrison said he was a former high school principal and he agreed with keeping the lunch period short enough to keep students focused on school.

Councilmember Lee expressed confidence in Mr. Aramaki and noted his work history. Responding to Mr. Lee, Mr. Aramaki said the State provides the same allocation per student, regardless of whether they are out-of-district.

Mr. Lee recalled that the previous SRO program helped educate students to become familiar with law enforcement and to see them as friends, not enemies.

Responding to Mayor Robinson, Mr. Harrison said there were four SROs in the high schools and two assigned to the middle schools. He said the program began as described by Councilmember Lee. However, over time the SROs became involved in enforcing school rules, which became problematic. He said a memorandum of understanding with the Bellevue Police Department is now required for a SRO program.

Mr. Lee said he saw value in the original program. Mr. Harrison agreed and noted that dozens of current officers are very involved in schools and the overall community.

Councilmember Lee asked about the use of school properties for activities and events. Dr. Aramaki said the school district does have some property and available buildings that could be used for different purposes. Rental fees go into the school district's general fund budget.

Councilmember Hamilton thanked Dr. Aramaki and the school district for their work. He expressed support for their efforts and said the district is a strong community asset. He said he looks forward to continued partnership with the school district.

Mr. Hamilton asked about the school funding forum. Dr. Aramaki said it reinforced for him how much the City supports education. He said the auditorium was over capacity for the recent town hall meeting at Sammamish High School. Dr. Aramaki commented on the critical need for education. He noted a decline in academic performance since 2012 after the advent of social media. He said youth often spend 4-5 hours per day on their phone and it is highly addictive.

Deputy Mayor Malakoutian encouraged more meetings between the City and the school district. He expressed support for the district's efforts.

Mayor Robinson said she was pleased to learn about the career and technical education program and about statewide online learning with the Bellevue School District. She commented that Issaquah schools are crowded and asked whether any of those students are interested in attending school in Bellevue. She asked about levy funding and the impact on school district programs.

Dr. Aramaki said Issaquah students are welcome if the capacity is available. Mr. Harrison commented on how school districts complement each other and how redistricting could potentially occur.

Dr. Aramaki said levy funding is critical in providing the ability to have 7th period classes encompassing music, art, theater and languages. He said these are the classes that bring students joy. He said half of the levy funds support special education and funds also help the district pay higher salaries for highly skilled teachers.

At 7:42 p.m., Mayor Robinson declared a break. The meeting resumed at 7:55 p.m.

(b) 2025 State Legislative Session Kick-off

City Manager Carlson noted that the state legislative session started the previous day. She introduced staff to provide an update.

Katie Kuciemba Halse, Assistant Director of Intergovernmental Relations, City Manager's Office, recalled that the Council approved Bellevue's State Legislative Agenda in October 2024. She said all nine executive office positions were retained by Democrats. She noted that Democrats can approve bonds and transfers out of the budget stabilization account without Republican support given the makeup of the state legislature. She said there was significant turnover in elected officials, resulting in new leadership and committee members and a majority of Democrats in both the State Senate and House of Representatives.

Ms. Halse said the King County Council appointed Vandana Slatter to the 48th Legislative District Senate seat and her seat in the House was filled by a Redmond City Councilmember. Representative Tana Senn in the 41st Legislative District has been selected to serve as the Director of the State Department of Children, Youth and Families so someone will be appointed to that House seat in the near future.

Ms. Halse said this is a 105-day session that will end on April 27. The session will focus on developing the 2025-2027 operating, transportation and capital budgets. The operating budget has a \$10 billion to \$12 billion shortfall over the next four years due to flattening or slightly decreasing revenues and rising costs. The 2025-2027 transportation budget has a \$200 million shortfall but the six-year budget reflects a \$6 billion shortfall due to a decrease in motor vehicle fuel tax revenues and toll revenues. The capital budget is not expected to increase as it has in recent years.

Ms. Halse said Governor Inslee released his proposed budget in December, which relies on \$13 billion in new tax revenue. It also impacts local government by sweeping \$100 million out of the Public Works Assistance Account and increasing the cost to cities for sending officers to basic law enforcement training. Ms. Halse said Governor Ferguson has significantly different budget priorities emphasizing more than \$4.4 billion in reductions to avoid increasing taxes. Mr. Ferguson also proposes a six percent reduction to most state agencies except those related to basic education. He is calling for new funding in the operating budget, including \$200 million over four years to develop a grant program for local departments to hire police officers.

Ms. Halse said 500 pre-filed bills were introduced before the state legislative session opened. She said City staff is already reviewing or monitoring more than 90 bills. Key topics for the legislative session are the budget shortfall, tax proposals, transportation funding, land use and zoning, environmental sustainability and school funding.

Ms. Halse highlighted the key legislative priorities in Bellevue's 2025 State Legislative Agenda: 1) Grand Connection downtown integration project and I-405 crossing, 2) SR 520/124th Avenue NE interchange, 3) I-405/SR 167 corridor projects, 4) affordable housing, and 5) digital permitting. The 2025 State Policy Statement identifies broader priorities reflecting the City budget's strategic target areas (STAs): high-performance government, vibrant economy, safe and efficient transportation, high-quality built and natural environment, safe community, and thriving people and communities.

Ms. Halse said the Association of Washington Cities (AWC) legislative agenda prioritizes fiscal sustainability, public safety, infrastructure investment, increasing the housing supply and increasing behavioral health treatment capacity.

Next steps include meetings with 41st and 48th district legislators and visits to Olympia and discussions with AWC and other stakeholders. The AWC City Action Days are February 19-20 and the legislative session ends on April 27. Ms. Halse said the revenue forecast will be released on March 20.

Mayor Robinson thanked Ms. Halse for the presentation.

Councilmember Nieuwenhuis thanked Ms. Halse for the update. Responding to Mr. Nieuwenhuis, Ms. Halse said Governor Inslee's budget was presented to the state legislature. Incoming Governor Ferguson has communicated separately regarding his priorities.

Mr. Nieuwenhuis expressed concern regarding House Bill 1217 addressing rent control. He said it could discourage new construction, reduce incentives to maintain existing properties, and push small housing providers out of the market. For tenants, there could be fewer housing options, higher rents, and deteriorating conditions in older housing stock.

Councilmember Nieuwenhuis expressed concern regarding the retail delivery tax, which he described as a regressive tax. He said online delivery fees disproportionately impact vulnerable populations, add more cars on the roadways, increase emissions and strain local businesses.

Ms. Halse said HB 1217 would cap annual rental increases at seven percent and prohibit landlords from raising the rental cost by any amount within the first year of tenancy. The bill exempts newly constructed apartments for the first 10 years. Ms. Halse said the bill is similar to a legislative proposal that passed the House last session. She said a hearing has already been scheduled to discuss the bill. Ms. Halse said Bellevue's State Policy Statement encompasses thriving people and communities, which includes access to housing. She said staff will monitor this bill and provide updates to the Council.

Ms. Halse said there has not yet been any proposed legislation regarding the retail delivery fee. She said the fee is one of multiple options under consideration to increase revenues. Staff will continue to monitor the bill and provide updates.

Councilmember Zahn thanked Ms. Halse for the information. Ms. Zahn said she would appreciate a weekly state legislative update. She recommended adding legislation affecting schools to the list of bills to be tracked. She said it is important to determine whether state budget reductions would result in the transfer of those responsibilities to local governments. She expressed concern about potential reductions to the Public Works Trust Fund. Regarding transportation, Ms. Zahn expressed an interest in information related to efforts to help transportation agencies to be more efficient and effective.

Mayor Robinson concurred with Councilmember Nieuwenhuis's concern about the proposed rental cap. She noted the critical need for new multifamily housing and cautioned against any measures that would further discourage the development of housing.

Ms. Robinson asked about a proposal to combine the LEOFF 1 and LEOFF 2 programs. Ms. Halse said Governor Inslee proposed the merger of the programs. The LEOFF 1 program has a \$2 billion surplus and the LEOFF 2 program is fully funded. The suggestion proposes moving \$1 billion to the general state budget after the merger is completed.

Responding to Councilmember Hamilton, Ms. Halse said the revenue forecast reflects increasing expenditures and decreasing revenues over time. She said the state legislature will need to evaluate whether to maintain, increase or defer current levels of service. She said state law requires a balanced budget. Mr. Hamilton said he looks forward to learning more about Governor Ferguson's budget proposals. Ms. Halse said his key priorities include basic education, community and technical colleges, and public safety. Councilmember Hamilton thanked Ms. Halse and the City's team for their work with the state legislature.

Councilmember Stokes thanked staff for their work and said he expects somewhat significant changes with the new governor and legislature.

Councilmember Lee thanked Ms. Halse for her work. Mr. Lee expressed concern regarding HB 1217 and said he does not want anything that will discourage the development of housing. He said he looked forward to learning about Governor Ferguson's perspective on the proposed bill.

Regarding transportation, Mr. Lee suggested continuing to find efficiencies and alternatives for cost savings. He advocated for the use of technology in this area.

Deputy Mayor Malakoutian thanked staff for the thorough presentation and information and expressed support for their efforts.

- (c) Downtown Center Redesignation - Update the Downtown Subarea Plan to redesignate Downtown as a Regional Growth Center as part of the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) Regional Centers Monitoring and Redesignation Process.

City Manager Carlson opened discussion regarding whether to update the Downtown Subarea Plan to redesignate the Downtown as a Regional Growth Center as part of the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) Regional Centers Monitoring and Redesignation Process.

Emil King, Director, Community Development Department, said the Downtown Subarea Plan is part of Volume 2, Neighborhood Plans, of the City's Comprehensive Plan. Volume 1 of the Comprehensive Plan was the focus of the recent periodic update to the plan. He described the proposed update to the Downtown Subarea Plan as a fine tuning that does not change previous policy direction.

Mr. King said staff is requesting Council direction to initiate work on updating the Downtown Subarea Plan to respond to PSRC's redesignation criteria for a Regional Growth Center.

Thara Johnson, Planning Director, said the Downtown Subarea Plan was certified by PSRC in 2020. Since that time, PSRC has amended the criteria slightly to align with the Vision 2050 Plan. Ms. Johnson said the proposed revisions align with broader changes made as part of the recent Comprehensive Plan periodic update.

Ms. Johnson said the redesignation process will evaluate all Regional Growth Centers. The update to the Downtown Subarea Plan is targeted to demonstrate that Downtown Bellevue is meeting all of PSRC's requirements.

Kate Nesse, Senior Planner, said the scope of the subarea plan update includes updating the data, equitable engagement, and updates to maps and policies. This includes transportation and environmental infrastructure maps, policies to mitigate residential and commercial displacement, policies related to historically underserved communities, and policies to reduce environmental impacts. The largest portion of the revisions relate to updating the data to align with the adopted growth targets and current Downtown conditions.

Ms. Johnson said this work is part of the City's 2025 Comprehensive Plan Amendment (CPA) process. The Planning Commission will develop a recommendation for Council consideration and adoption toward the end of the year. The community engagement process focuses on sharing information, equitable outreach, and working with stakeholders including Downtown residents, businesses and organizations.

Mayor Robinson thanked staff for the presentation.

Deputy Mayor Malakoutian said that low-income and small business displacement is an issue in the Downtown. He expressed an interest in lessons to be learned in this area from other cities. He encouraged broad outreach in the community engagement process.

→ Deputy Mayor Malakoutian moved to direct staff to initiate work on updating the Downtown Subarea Plan to respond to Puget Sound Regional Council's redesignation criteria for maintaining the designation as a Regional Growth Center. Councilmember Stokes seconded the motion.

Councilmember Hamilton expressed support for the motion and thanked staff for their work.

Councilmember Lee thanked staff and expressed support for the motion.

Councilmember Nieuwenhuis thanked staff for the update and expressed his support.

Councilmember Zahn expressed support for the motion. She asked about anticipated impacts to the curb management plan. Mr. King said the curb management plan is included in the Transportation Element of the Comprehensive Plan and is not intended to be revised as part of this process.

Councilmember Stokes expressed support for the motion.

Mayor Robinson wondered whether this was an opportunity to consider incentivizing affordable commercial space.

→ The motion carried by a vote of 7-0.

11. Land Use: None.

12. Other Ordinances, Resolutions, and Motions: None.

13. Written Reports

(a) Intergovernmental Affairs Monthly Update

14. Unfinished Business: None.

15. New Business: None.

16. Executive Session: None.

17. Adjournment

At 9:10 p.m., Mayor Robinson declared the meeting adjourned.

Charmaine Arredondo, CMC
City Clerk

/kaw