



Downtown Livability LAND USE CODE UPDATE

March 2017 Status Report

What is the Downtown Livability Initiative?

The Downtown Livability Initiative represents the first substantial update of the Downtown Land Use Code (Part 20.25A LUC) since its original adoption in 1981. The update responds to over 30 years of development and ensures Downtown’s regulatory framework is consistent with the City’s Comprehensive Plan, in particular the Downtown Subarea Plan’s central theme of making Downtown more viable, livable, memorable and accessible. Based on historic and anticipated growth trends, Downtown is well on its way to becoming a true urban center, attracting more and more people to live, work and play.

Adhering to a set of Council guiding principles, the scope of the Land Use Code Update is examining the following elements:

- Public Open Space;
- Pedestrian Corridor;
- Design Guidelines;
- Amenity Incentive System;
- Station Area Planning;
- Building Height and Form;
- Downtown Parking; and
- Other Topics (such as sidewalk widths, vacant sites and buildings, mechanical equipment screening, recycling and solid waste, range of permitted uses and Downtown food trucks).



Informed by a set of Land Use Code “Audits” and significant public input, a Council-appointed Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) convened 13 times between May 2013 and June 2014 to develop a set of recommendations for potential code changes as well as a number of areas for additional analysis. The Planning Commission began its review of the CAC recommendations in June 2015. The Commission is now asking for community feedback on a draft Land Use Code on March 8, 2017 (see page 4 for additional detail).

How is Livability Being Advanced?

The draft Downtown Land Use Code currently before the Planning Commission for review and refinement, together with the prior “Early Wins” amendments contribute to the City’s livability objectives for Downtown Bellevue as summarized below.

Walkability

- Increase the width of sidewalks required on multiple streets.
- Improve through-block connections for pedestrians to navigate the Downtown on foot.
- Improve street-edge pedestrian conditions that promote visual interest, pedestrian-scaled lighting and signage, pedestrian amenities, enhanced/active streetscapes and integration of artistic elements.
- Expand weather protection to enhance year-round pedestrian comfort.
- Accommodate additional capital improvements identified as part of companion Downtown Transportation Plan.

Neighborhood Character

- Reinforce key elements of unique Downtown neighborhood character.
- Tailor open space amenities to align with neighborhood needs.

Urban Form, Light and Air

- Enhance access to light and air between towers with separation between towers and ground level open spaces.
- Expand variability in the built environment.
- Enhance skyline form and memorability.
- Improve building form to avoid blocky and homogeneous character of buildings.

Transition Between Downtown and Adjoining Neighborhoods

- Retain graceful transitions between urban forms of the Downtown and adjacent lower intensity neighborhoods.
- Reinforce pedestrian connections between Downtown and adjacent areas.
- Focus on gateways into and out of the Downtown to reinforce transitions.

Downtown Amenities

- Improve relationship of amenities to Downtown neighborhood character.
- Update economics based on market realities to ensure incentives are used and achieve intended outcomes.

More Green and Sustainable Downtown

- Enhance focus on sustainability and ecological performance in the development of buildings and sites throughout Downtown (to ensure a softer and more sustainable environment).



- Increase green features in the pedestrian realm – planter strips and tree pits, green walls, open space.

Accessibility

- Improve accessibility for all residents and visitors to Downtown, including improved accessibility for vans/cars in parking areas and for mobility-impaired pedestrians.

Mixed Use Downtown

- Update code to accommodate the evolving character of uses found in vibrant pedestrian areas (e.g. doggie day cares).
- Level the playing field for nonresidential uses, to ensure that Downtown continues to also serve as a strong office/job center.

Affordable Housing

- Encourage affordable housing through a range of tools (to be further developed with city-wide Affordable Housing Strategy efforts).

Planning for Light Rail Stations

- Improve pedestrian connections around station areas.
- Ensure that the right use and density mix is enabled around stations.

Parking

- Enhance flexibility in the calculation of parking ratios to guard against overbuilding while maintaining parking levels essential to accommodate visitors.
- Enhance parking standards to accommodate multimodal commuters in need of supporting infrastructure (e.g., bike facilities).

Flexibility

- Add flexibility to ensure the Code allows for the best and most creative development ideas.

Building Height and Form

- Add height to incent the development of slender buildings that provide greater tower separation and ground-level open space.
- Add height to foster the use of distinctive architecture that contributes to a variable and recognizable skyline.
- Add amenities to offset the livability impacts of added building height and density.



Process Update

Over the past 18 months, the Planning Commission has been refining the work of the Downtown Livability CAC to develop a consolidated draft Downtown Land Use Code to solicit public comment. **A public hearing will be held before the Planning Commission at 6:30 p.m. on March 8, 2017 at Bellevue City Hall, room 1E-113. Written comments may be submitted to planningcommission@bellevuewa.gov.**

The full set of public hearing materials, including staff report and draft Code may be accessed at: http://www.bellevuewa.gov/pdf/land%20use/15-123469-AD_12-127731-AD_Downtown_Livability.pdf

At Commission meetings following the public hearing, the Planning Commission will work to finalize the draft Downtown Land Use Code Update and transmit its recommendation to the City Council for final review and approval.

The draft Land Use Code represents the second installment of amendments necessary to advance the Downtown Livability Initiative. Council adopted a set of “Early Wins” code amendments in March 2016. These included updates to the land use charts, signage requirements for publicly accessible spaces, mechanical equipment location and screening standards, street trees requirements, minor adjustment to the Downtown boundary, overhead weather protection requirements and an extension of the Major Pedestrian Corridor.

Major Project Milestones to Date

▪ Planning Commission public hearing on draft Land Use Code	March 8, 2017
▪ Notice of public hearing on draft Land Use Code	February 16, 2017
▪ Urban Land Institute peer review of incentive zoning analysis	January 2017
▪ Consolidated code package available for public review	November 2016
▪ Proposed structure and approach for incentive zoning system	June 2016
▪ Interim controls re: retail/pedestrian frontage adopted by Council	May 2016
▪ “Early Wins” Downtown code amendments adopted by Council	March 2016
▪ Council guidance for updating Downtown incentive zoning	January 2016
▪ Joint Council/Planning Commission meeting on incentive zoning	November 2015
▪ Commission begins review of CAC recommendations	June 2015
▪ Council direction to Commission to begin code development	May 2015
▪ CAC Final Report published	October 2014
▪ Downtown CAC completes work	June 2014
▪ Land Use Code Audits published	June 2013
▪ Downtown CAC begins work	May 2013
▪ Downtown Livability Initiative launched by Council	2013

For More Information

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Planning Commission web page – http://www.bellevuewa.gov/planning_commission.htm

Downtown Livability web page – <http://www.bellevuewa.gov/downtown-livability.htm>