

BELLEVUE-REDMOND TOURISM PROMOTION AREA ADVISORY BOARD
MEETING MINUTES

November 4, 2025
1:00 pm

Bellevue City Hall
Room 1E-113 / Virtual

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairperson Dermarkarian, Wade Hashimoto, Kate Hudson, Rocky Rosenbach

MEMBERS REMOTE: Kim Saunderson

MEMBERS ABSENT: Cassandra Leiberman, Nate Moore

STAFF PRESENT: Manette Stamm, Lorie Hoffman, Lizzette Flores, Jesse Canedo, Department of Community Development

OTHERS PRESENT: Brad Jones, Visit Bellevue; Kristina Hudson, Melody Lanthorn, OneRedmond; Philly Marsh, Jackie Lalor, City of Redmond

MINUTES SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 1:01 p.m. by Caroline Dermarkarian who presided. All members were present with the exception of Cassandra Leiberman and Nate Moore.

2. APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND MINUTES

A. Approval of Agenda

Motion to approve the agenda was made by Wade Hashimoto. The motion was seconded was by Kate Hudson and the motion carried unanimously.

B. Approval of Minutes

Motion to approve the August 5, 2025, minutes as submitted was made by Wade Hashimoto. The motion was seconded was by Kate Hudson and the motion carried unanimously.

3. ORAL COMMUNICATIONS – None

4. ACTION, DISCUSSION AND INFORMATION ITEMS

A. Discussion: Bylaws

Cultural Tourism Specialist Lizzette Flores reminded the Board that as previously discussed, meetings will be held monthly between February and July, and on the fourth Tuesday of October. The meeting times will be from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.

The Board members were reminded that the bylaw revisions also include standardized decorum and conduct language aligned with Ordinance 6864 and the Bellevue City Code, which is consistent with all city boards and commissions. Among the updates was the extension of the exclusion period for disruptive behavior from 60 to 180 days; a clarification

of the appeals process requiring written notices within six business days; and the specification that appeals will be reviewed by the City Council at its next meeting. Additional edits were limited to formatting improvements and the use of gender-neutral language throughout. Because the updates were only recently finalized by the City Council, all of the changes will be presented together for a single vote at the next meeting.

A motion directing staff to return the full set of recommended bylaw amendments for final adoption at the next meeting was made by Wade Hashimoto. The motion was seconded by Kate Hudson and the motion carried unanimously.

B. Information: Staff Update

Lizzette Flores reported on the City of Bellevue's strategy for the upcoming World Cup. During the World Cup, the City intends to create a lively environment for visitors, residents, and workers by supporting cultural, musical, and artistic programming at several light rail stations. Bellevue will partner with local organizations, including Visit Bellevue, the BelRed Arts District, the Spring District, and the Bellevue Downtown Association, each of which will select and coordinate activations at designated stations. The City also aims to guide small and large businesses regarding sponsorship opportunities and compliance with FIFA regulations, and to align all promotional efforts with nearby jurisdictions such as Redmond to ensure a cohesive regional visitor experience.

Lizzette Flores also described some ongoing process improvements that are intended to facilitate community events, including simplifying the permitting process for neighborhood block parties, easing the requirements for small events under 500 attendees, and identifying streets suitable for periodic closure to support programming. Staff are confident that Sound Transit's light rail line will open in time for the event. There is a shuttle service contingency plan in place that will kick in if necessary.

Answering a question asked by Kate Hudson, Lizzette Flores said the City's community programming fund will include a World Cup-related emphasis to encourage broader cultural activations throughout the city.

Wade Hashimoto pointed out that significant visitor traffic is anticipated during the World Cup and asked if the light rail train capacity will be sufficient. The current light rail trains are running with only two cars. Lizzette Flores agreed to follow up with Sound Transit regarding capacity concerns.

Caroline Dermarkarian asked about the timing of public and hospitality-sector communications. Lizzette Flores said there will be coordination with partner organizations and Visit Bellevue to ensure that hotels and others receive World Cup event and activation details as soon as concrete plans are finalized. The intent is to distribute information well in advance.

5. COMMISSION QUICK BUSINESS – None

6. REPORTS AND PARTNER PRESENTATIONS

Lizzette Flores said the revenue report included in the packet showed the accumulation of remittances, broken down by category and month, and showed what had been drawn from the contingency fund. Bellevue's contingency reserve for 2025 began at approximately \$248,000, and although tourism development expenses have exceeded earlier projections, current spending remains within the available contingency.

A similar overview was provided for Redmond where approximately \$77,000 of an \$88,000 contingency has been used, leaving about \$10,000 remaining to support higher-than-expected marketing and communications costs. There was earlier in the year an invoice that included a line item allocated to festivals and events. It was processed outside of Redmond's festivals and events allocation and the correction was properly applied. Updated tables were reviewed showing remittances, interest earnings, invoiced amounts, beginning balances carried over from the previous year, and administrative fees. A correction to the OneRedmond total was highlighted to ensure consistency and match information already in hand.

The year to date balances for both zone were shared with the Board. Both zones started out with extra funds in their accounts from previous years: Bellevue \$256,000 and Redmond \$640,000. The administration fees were shown as being accounted for.

A. Visit Bellevue Quarterly Report

Brad Jones, executive director of Visit Bellevue, reported that overnight visitors were up two percent, five percent and six percent in the trailing months of the third quarter. Visitor spending also rose steadily, up five percent, nine percent and ten percent and generating an economic impact of roughly \$200 million per month. Hotel occupancy improved significantly in the third quarter with citywide occupancy exceeding 80 percent in July and August and nearing that level in September, though average daily room rates declined in comparison to prior periods due to competitive market pressures and changing visitor demographics.

Hotel revenues remain roughly even for the year, even though September saw a five percent bounce. Domestic spending continues to hold the market up nicely. Domestic travel remains the primary driver of visitor activity, including increased travel from regional Pacific Northwest markets, while international visitation experienced a measurable decline, particularly in spending within the retail and restaurant categories. China remained stable as a visitor origin, while Canada continued to lag. Overall, the international visitor numbers showed a slight downward shift late in the third quarter. The top accommodation markets were Dallas, San Francisco, Spokane, Tri Cities and areas in Oregon. Bellevue's hotel average daily rates and stay values continue to trend positively, which does say something about why Bellevue's average daily rate has been challenged over the last few months.

Brad Jones stated that TPAs statewide are allowed to collect a total of \$5 per night. There was an original bill of \$2 and later a bill was passed that allowed for collecting an additional \$3. The legislature is requiring TPA cities to conduct a program review of the additional program area charge, which is the additional \$3, and submit it by January 1. Eight cities and the state's DMO association joined forces to make sure the reporting is consistent. The cities jointly contracted with an organizational development and policy firm called Uncommon Bridges to prepare a single master report containing consistent data and language, with individual chapters for each jurisdiction. The report will address how assessment funds were spent, what additional marketing activities were undertaken, whether the added assessment supported increased visitation, and the estimated cost per visit attributable to the fee. Once completed, the report will be submitted to the Board for review before being presented to the legislature. The cities intend to advocate for the \$3 assessment to be made permanent, while acknowledging that there is a degree of financial risk, particularly regarding the fifty cent portion of the fee that could be subject to legislative change.

Wade Hashimoto asked if the legislative engagement could also be used to pursue adjustments for inflation or other cost-of-living increases in future assessment levels. Brad Jones responded that the issue is part of ongoing discussions among tourism jurisdictions, but it poses challenges because lodging markets vary significantly across the state. Any legislative proposal to allow percentage-based or rate-based adjustments would need to be structured

carefully. Many stakeholders are cautious about reopening the underlying statute in the current political environment. The legislative session is scheduled to conclude in early spring, at which point the Board will have clearer direction.

Brad Jones noted that website traffic and social media engagement continue to exceed the annual goals. The organization plans to reset the targets upward due to early-year overperformance. The team is also working to ensure Bellevue-related information is accurately represented in artificial intelligence search tools, which are increasingly being used by travelers. Public relations results have been strong, with earned media value exceeding the targets. There is ongoing benefit from the recently launched brand work. Marketing creative assets, particularly short-form video, have been refined continuously to reflect audience engagement trends, and the organization is expanding email and out-of-home communications efforts.

With regard to the international marketing initiatives, Brad Jones noted that the Japan market campaign, operated with a modest budget, has yielded strong impressions and engagement. Based on air travel patterns, traveler spending behavior, and lodging trends, the organization has selected South Korea as its next overseas market. Work will begin on building outreach channels, engaging media partners, and preparing destination promotional toolkits for local tourism partners. The Japan program will continue as an ongoing campaign alongside the new addition.

The inaugural printing of the organization's culinary guide was produced in a run of approximately 20,000 and will be inserted into Vancouver BC Magazine in November and the winter issue of Portland Monthly in mid-November. The remaining copies will be distributed to local restaurants and hotels to address frequent visitor inquiries about dining.

The media missions continue, with one final event scheduled in Portland on November 19 featuring Chef Shota, whose regional profile has driven high journalist interest.

With regard to sales performance, Brad Jones said the lead trends rebounded in the third quarter, yielding a record 331 group leads and 226,000 room-night leads year-to-date. The fourth quarter is pivotal with decisions pending on approximately 82,000 future room nights. Contracted business was characterized as good but below last year's record pace, standing at about 46,000 room nights versus roughly 53,000 at the same time last year. The year-end goal is 75,000. Room nights lost trended about where they were projected to be based on economic impact and room-night volume. There have been 29 conferences and conventions canceled to date due to competitive rate pressures, particularly from Seattle and other West Coast destinations. The day-of-week analysis showed improving weekend performance, reflecting coordinated efforts with hotel sales teams to add and incentivize weekend days.

Kate Hudson asked if the ability of the team to secure weekend gains is tied to rates or to there just being more people wanting to be in the area over the weekend. Brad Jones said rate is certainly the most aggressive motivator to meeting planners. In addition, more leads are being cultivated in the SMERF area and the small-market areas that appeal more to weekend groups.

Brad Jones stated that conversion rates remain healthy, averaging around 29 percent to date in 2025.

The demand for Bellhop has grown markedly, with 7100 rides in September. However, the average wait time remains near twelve minutes. A recent deep-dive found about half of the riders are served within ten minutes and roughly 70 percent within 15 minutes, but the demand currently outstrips the capacity by about two to one. Visitor trips now account for approximately a quarter of the ridership, with residents comprising the largest share and the

workforce remaining significant. The service area remains about six square miles. The organization has initiated community discussions on how to scale the service responsibly over the next six to eight months, but it must be acknowledged that Visit Bellevue's funding is limited relative to total ridership growth.

The airport shuttle metrics indicate 6300 total passengers served to date, with a target of at least 1200 riders per month and a sustainability number closer to 1500. Recent hotel additions include the Courtyard, Residence Inn and InterContinental, and the operator's contract has been extended through next year. The pricing model has been scaled to allow for multi-passenger pricing that can reduce the per-person cost to between \$15 and \$20 for parties of three or four. The typical Uber X fare for four persons is around \$90, and there is no luggage limit. Planning is underway for an on-demand cruise shuttle next summer, supported by the anticipated growth in cruise sailings from two additional lines, a development that is expected to complement the World Cup-related demand.

Discussions regarding what to do with BikeHop going forward are underway. The project has been an interesting one and there are sustainable solutions identified that could be implemented.

Brad Jones said it has been a huge year for culinary tourism through the thematic food weeks. Next year the food weeks will be optimized with content, partnerships, and events.

The Bellevue Bound learning series continues to release new edition monthly. Much can be learned about the community through the series. The culinary series was recently launched hosted by Anna Yan.

Brad Jones offered a thank you to all who are part of Wheel the World, the destination accessibility program that just completed its first year. In all 25 Bellevue businesses were verified and are listed on the booking platform. Content creation is planned for early next year, and another 25 businesses will be added along with the ongoing online staff training. The bookings side is being activated and the return-on-investment is being monitored.

Rocky Rosenbach asked who is in the comp set in terms of market share. Brad Jones said the set is composed of Seattle, Everett, Redmond, Seattle Southside and Tacoma.

B. OneRedmond Quarterly Report

Kristina Hudson, administrator of the Redmond zone TPA, stated that the hotels located in the Redmond zone of the TPA are valued partners who play a key role. In the third quarter OneRedmond worked closely with the City of Redmond and the Experience Redmond brand to improve tourism infrastructure and the efforts emphasized enhancing the accuracy of tourism and hospitality data, streamlining visitor booking tools, and creating new mechanisms to support events that drive overnight stays. To support evidence-based decision making, the team continued refining hotel data sources through CoStar and began exploring KeyData as an alternative. A new Book Direct hotel booking widget was integrated into multiple webpages, including the OneRedmond and Experience Redmond sites, and the Redmond Town Center event pages. Additionally, the staff developed a new grant program to support tourism-oriented event organizers who are creating and promoting events that drive tourism that will increase hotel occupancy. The grant program will provide resources to events that miss the city's LTAC application deadline.

Kristina Hudson explained that OneRedmond uses a flexible staffing model that includes core team members and six to eight contractors who provide support in bookkeeping, logistics, tourism development, sales, and coordination. Redmond maintains approximately 1598 hotel

rooms across ten properties, including two full service hotels, three extended stay hotels, and five limited service hotels. Redmond's hotel occupancy, rooms sold and overnight visitors in the third quarter increased by .76 percent compared to the same quarter in 2024. The average daily rates declined by 2.97 percent compared with the prior year. Year to date through September, Redmond experienced a 2.75 percent increase in occupancy, and a 1.43 percent decrease in the average daily rate compared with the same period in 2024.

Strategic marketing efforts advanced significantly in the third quarter. OneRedmond launched its first targeted tourism campaigns focused on key niche markets, including dog-friendly tourism and entertainment-focused travelers. Dedicated creative assets and landing pages accompanied the campaigns. The early results indicated strong performance: the Google search click-through rates exceeded the benchmarks by 23 percent; the concert-related campaigns on Meta outperformed the travel industry benchmarks by 81 percent; the dog-related Meta campaigns exceeded the benchmarks by over 200 percent; and the display native ads surpassed the industry benchmarks by 57 percent. Combined, the campaigns generated an estimated economic impact of approximately \$26,800 and a return on the ad spend of \$4.20 for every dollar spent. Website user growth rose more than one thousand percent year over year.

Kristina Hudson said the paid search and Meta advertising showed continued performance gains in impressions, click-through rates, and cost efficiency. Through the end of August there were almost 43,000 impressions and 2466 clicks. The click-through rate reached 5.7 percent, 23 percent above the industry benchmark. The cost per click was eighty-four cents. The Meta campaign for concerts generated 293,249 impressions. The link clicks were 4774, and the click-through rate was 81 percent above the benchmark. The cost per click was sixty-two cents. For the dog campaign there were 123,876 impressions. There were 3429 link clicks, and the click-through rate was 2.77 percent, also above the benchmark. The cost per click came in at sixty-one cents.

Programmatic advertising through Datafy produced additional measurable visitation, with an estimated of \$41,400 in visitor spending based on 142 trips, or \$291.60 spent per visitor. The display and native click-through rates outperformed the Datafy benchmarks. The campaign generated returns of \$12.38 per dollar spent.

The Book Direct referral tool measures the number of clicks to the hotel booking engines. By using the tool, referrals converted ten times better than searches at 35.58 percent. The referrals generated 35 percent higher booking values at \$1458. The search volume was three times larger but it underperformed on conversions. Referral customers booked closer to arrival and stayed longer. The upshot is that referrals have zero acquisition costs but deliver great results.

Redmond's LTAC funding for pay-per-click advertising was significantly reduced for the biennium. OneRedmond supplemented Experience Redmond's online advertising program, amplifying Redmond's total tourism outreach. The subsequent metrics showed increases in impressions to 84,000; a rise in clicks by 2220; an improvement in the click-through rate of .43 percent; and only a slight increase in the cost per click. The hotel campaigns conversions are measured as a click-through to individual hotel pages, and the individual clicks on the hotel reservation buttons on the Experience Redmond page. During the period, 1170 conversions or clicks to individual hotel sites were recorded. For the YouTube campaign there were 59 conversions, new followers or subscribers.

With regard to the KPIs for the Experience Redmond website, the primary landing page for the hotel campaign traffic, it was noted that the page views were increased by 142 percent; users increased by 157 percent; page views per active user decreased by six percent; and the average engagement time decreased by 17 percent.

The airport advertising placement promoting Redmond's dog-friendly tourism and public crawl campaign was originally intended for a limited run, but the installation remains in place due to ongoing construction at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport, extending its visibility. The QR code links are being continuously updated to maintain relevance.

With regard to destination development, Kristina Hudson reaffirmed the focus on niche experiential offerings suited to a market without a large conference facility, including dog-friendly, wine-focused, and accessibility-centered tourism programming. Planning for the upcoming year is already underway. The team has confirmed a partnership with Woodinville Wine Country and the City of Redmond for 2026, paired with an expanded engagement with winemakers to support special activations intended to increase overnight stays and strengthen the local hospitality sector.

Dog-focused tourism activations aim to engage visitors and residents. Plans were finalized for a Halloween partnership with Redmond Town Center and hotels featuring a themed costume parade, and for a Santa Paws photo series running Mondays after Thanksgiving through December 22. These initiatives strengthen Redmond's pet-friendly identity, create memorable experiences, and generate promotional content. Partnerships have expanded to include Postdoc Brewing for pet events, Salt & Straw for dog-safe products, and Brick & Mortar Books with Redmond Town Center for dog-themed programming.

OneRedmond continues to pursue inclusive and accessible travel initiatives, including partnerships with certified autism-friendly programs and Wheel the World, and research into digital concierge tools. Several platforms were reviewed to support personalized visitor services. To improve mobility for hotel guests, OneRedmond distributed 300 Sound Transit ORCA day-trip cards to area hotels with reusable sleeves for return and reuse, and will reload cards with \$6 day-trip fares as needed. Additionally, OneRedmond purchased 508 \$25 gift cards for rideshare support, aiding hotel group sales and special packages to enhance transportation convenience.

In destination sales, it was stated that OneRedmond is focused on identifying non-traditional gathering spaces due to the absence of a large conference facility in Redmond, including local venues such as church properties, for potential event use. The organization is also coordinating on branded promotional items such as wireless portable speakers, chargers, water bottles, and luggage tags for use in client outreach, trade shows, and media familiarization tours, all with the intent of reinforcing Redmond's identity as a welcoming destination.

C. City of Redmond Tourism Budget and World Cup Overview

Philly Marsh, city of Redmond Economic Development Manager, introduced the municipal tourism team and explained that the tourism program is funded from two separate sources: the one percent lodging tax collected by the city and managed by the LTAC, which is projected to be about \$700,000; and the \$2.50 nightly fee. Combined, the two sources add up to \$1.5 million. A portion of the lodging tax funds go toward a marketing consultant, Bullseye Creative, to manage the Experience Redmond tourism brand.

The City completed its first tourism strategic plan following extensive internal and external stakeholder engagement. The plan established 64 initiatives, a number of which are already underway. The plan serves as a roadmap to success and dictates the workplan and budget. The plan was developed by a nationally-recognized consultant.

The budget is divided between ongoing expenses and one-time investments guided by the strategic plan. Marketing and communications account for the largest share of the budget,

while the LTAC grant program provides annual support for external tourism-generating events and selected cultural programming. The city established a policy that requires at least 60 percent of the prior year's lodging tax revenues to be held in reserve to protect against economic disruptions. The remaining funds are directed toward pilot initiatives such as supporting preparations for the World Cup, light rail activation, technology enhancements, and digital asset development. The pilots are all designed to be evaluated for long-term continuation as the visitor economy expands.

Philly Marsh highlighted the opening of Marymoor and Downtown Redmond light rail stations as major milestones, with additional marketing planned for the Seattle bridge connection by April 2026. She said the City retained its first PR agency for influencer outreach and media coverage, invested in geofencing to analyze visitor patterns, and awarded a new three-year Experience Redmond contract to Bullseye Creative, supported by a strategic annual content calendar.

The tourism workplan emphasizes transportation infrastructure as a core visitor amenity. The city will introduce its own version of the Bellhop electric shuttle service in early 2026 using the same operating vendor Bellevue uses to provide connections between the downtown light rail station and key destinations. The LTAC has also expressed interest in supporting bicycle-related tourism and that has prompted exploration of secure bike storage options in hotels and coordination with citywide wayfinding improvements.

Several Experience Redmond promotional initiatives were reviewed, including expanded programming around the light rail launch. The Ride and Seek scavenger hunt attracted more than 2000 participants and brought many new visitors into the city. The long-standing partnership with Cirque du Soleil continues and now occurs annually, helping to draw visitors during the winter and shoulder seasons.

Experience Redmond impressions on social media are up and there has been steady growth in website engagement. There were approximately 15 million earned media impressions during the first six months of the new public relations campaign that highlights Redmond's pet-friendly amenities, family-friendly activities, transit access, and outdoor recreation.

Philly Marsh reported that City Council allocated funding to leverage the World Cup as an opportunity to promote Redmond, build community pride, support district development, and attract visitor spending. She said the City's approach highlights Redmond's light rail connectivity, multicultural character, and soccer identity, showcased by Marymoor Park fields visible from the rail line. Marsh noted strong participation in engagement events, including business roundtables, resident outreach, and a Club World Cup watch party supported by Amazon and Redmond Town Center. Continuing programs include watch-party grants, a soccer storytelling campaign, and a public Soccer 101 session led by former players. She added that a neighborhood ambassador group is forming to shape celebrations. Upcoming events include a World Cup draw watch party at the Archer Hotel, with programming concluding in July at the "Meet Me in Marymoor" community celebration during the World Cup final.

7. ADJOURNMENT

Caroline Dermarkarian adjourned the meeting at 2:45 p.m.