

BELLEVUE-REDMOND TOURISM PROMOTION AREA ADVISORY BOARD
MEETING MINUTES

March 24, 2026
1:00 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Room 1E-113 / Virtual

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairperson Dermarkarian, Cassandra Leiberman

MEMBERS REMOTE: Kate Hudson, Rocky Rosenbach, Crystal Pia, Nate Moore

MEMBERS ABSENT: Wade Hashimoto, Kim Saunderson

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

OTHERS PRESENT: Brad Jone, Jane Kantor, Meredith Langridge, Megan Adams, Sheila Freeman, Visit Bellevue; Kristina Hudson, Audrey Fan, Melody Lanthorn, OneRedmond

MINUTES SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 1:04 p.m. by Caroline Dermarkarian who presided. All members were present with the exception of Wade Hashimoto and Kim Saunderson. It was noted that in accord with the bylaws restricting the number of online participants, Nate Moore counted as being present as non-voting visitor.

2. APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND MINUTES

A. Approval of Agenda

Cultural Tourism Specialist Lizzette Flores asked the members to revise the agenda to move item 4B, election of Chair and Vice Chair, to be last on the agenda.

Motion to approve the agenda as amended was made by Cassandra Leiberman. The motion was seconded was by Kate Hudson and the motion carried unanimously.

B. Approval of Minutes

Motion to approve the February 24, 2026, minutes as submitted was made by Cassandra Leiberman. The motion was seconded was by Rocky Rosenbach and the motion carried unanimously.

3. ORAL COMMUNICATIONS – None

4. ACTION, DISCUSSION AND INFORMATION ITEMS

A. Information – Welcome New Board Member

Lizzette Flores welcomed Crystal Pia to fill a vacant seat representing the Redmond side. The welcoming remarks expressed enthusiasm about the appointment. That was followed by a

brief round of introductions in which each member identified themselves and professional roles.

Lizzette Flores said an application was been received from Henning Nopper to fill the upcoming vacancy on the Bellevue side.

A motion to approve the applicant was made by Kate Hudson The motion was seconded by Cassandra Leiberman and the motion carried unanimously.

Lizzette Flores said the application would be forwarded to the City Manager for final review and confirmation prior to the next meeting.

C. Discussion – 2027 Budget and Scope of Work Bellevue Zone

Brad Jones, executive director of Visit Bellevue, underscored the importance of long-range planning in the hospitality and tourism sector, noting that early preparation helps destinations remain competitive. He reviewed Visit Bellevue’s organizational structure and history, highlighting its formal development beginning in 2017 and its partnership with the City of Bellevue to position tourism as a core element of economic development. He noted that designated tourism resources fund governance, advisory groups, and program-delivery teams, with most resources supporting operational initiatives rather than administrative costs.

He also outlined the organization’s updated strategic plan, which emphasizes creativity, safety, diversity, sustainability, and priorities such as urban placemaking, arts and innovation, recreation, culinary development, conferences and events, and long-term infrastructure planning. These efforts are supported by a refreshed destination branding initiative.

The brand position of radiant wonder has grounded Visit Bellevue into approachable luxury, nature’s nexus, global community and the future in focus. The approach is refining the marketing to about twenty million individuals in strategically identified markets. The completed destination development plan and finalized brand framework now provide a clear foundation for aligning a future strategy. Ultimately Bellevue is emerging as a sophisticated destination city that blends urban energy, global business leadership and natural beauty, creating a meaningful experience for both visitors and residents.

Strategic outcomes for the 2027 planning period focus on demand generation and long-term competitiveness. Key priorities include strengthening Bellevue’s identity within the regional market, increasing high-value overnight visitation, and investing in experiences and events that bolster slower periods such as weekends and shoulder seasons. These priorities also support community vibrancy and sustainable growth.

Some flagship initiatives are proposed for 2027. They include signature events and culinary tourism offerings to create incentives for overnight visits; expanded outdoor and waterfront experiences to leverage existing natural assets; and enhanced arts, culture, and innovation programming to support year-round engagement. Visit Bellevue plans to rebuild its content creation and strategic storytelling program to expand audience reach and further promote local hospitality businesses. A new speakers bureau initiative will serve as a resource to provide conference organizers with access to pre-identified subject matter experts from local industries, thereby increasing the destination’s competitive advantage in attracting meetings and events.

Brad Jones said Visit Bellevue has been on an extraordinary growth trajectory, primarily because of the BRTPA; 2026 is the first of the leveling off years. While growth is expected to stabilize in the near term, ambitious performance targets remain in place, including achieving

approximately 2.5 million overnight visitors; reaching a weekend hotel occupancy of 69 percent; maintaining an overall citywide occupancy rate of 73 percent; and generating an estimated economic impact exceeding \$2.5 billion dollars from overnight visitation.

Jane Kantor, director of destination sales for Visit Bellevue, highlighted the continued development of a specialized meeting and conference brand launched the previous year, which will remain a distinguishing feature of the marketing efforts. The performance metrics for 2027 were identified as generating approximately 350,000 room-night leads and securing bookings totaling 80,000 room nights. Several strategic initiatives were emphasized, including the continued refinement of trade show participation based on performance analysis, and the implementation of a targeted outreach program aimed at travelers associated with cruise itineraries to Alaska. The strategy is intended to capture a greater share of visitors passing through the Pacific Northwest by encouraging them to extend their stay on the Eastside.

Caroline Dermarkarian sought clarification regarding how the goals for 2027 compare to those for 2026. Jane Kantor said the 2026 goal is 235,000 leads and 76,000 room nights booked.

Cassandra Leiberman asked for more information about the speakers bureau. Jane Kantor explained that the bureau will consist of pre-vetted speakers with prepared biographies, enabling rapid coordination with conference organizers and reducing the delays associated with identifying appropriate experts on short notice. The bureau is intended to serve as a valuable sales and marketing tool.

Turning to marketing and communications, Brad Jones described the organization's core communication channels, which include earned media coverage, digital platforms, and visitor guides, each of which functions collectively to convert interest into confirmed travel plans. The organization continues to invest in visitor and culinary guides as key planning tools, both as print and digital planning resources. Visit Bellevue is growing its presence internationally, especially in Japan and South Korea where outreach efforts are entering their second year of sustained engagement. The initiatives are essential components of the broader strategy to strengthen global visibility and drive continued visitation growth in the years ahead.

Visit Bellevue is proactively incorporating artificial intelligence strategies into its destination marketing efforts. Artificial intelligence represents a significant opportunity to enhance how destinations are discovered and selected by travelers.

Brad Jones outlined the key performance indicators for marketing, including the paid media goals, social media goals, website traffic, and public relations outcomes. The website goal is to get to 1.4 million sessions in 2027. The website is currently being rebuilt and it will launch in a couple of months. Public relations is an area that has seen tremendous growth, including 260 placements and \$13 million in paid media value last year, a figure that has already been passed so far in 2026.

Caroline Dermarkarian asked the reason behind not increasing the 2027 goals. Brad Jones stressed the need to maintain realistic performance benchmarks in light of rapidly changing technology and market conditions. The key performance indicators put forward function as baseline return-on-investment benchmark tied to current funding levels rather than aspirational maximums. While the organization consistently aims to surpass the benchmarks the identified metrics represent minimum performance standards and provide for a stable framework for evaluating program effectiveness while allowing flexibility to achieve higher results when market conditions permit.

Visitor Experience head Meredith Langridge outlined a series of programs for 2027 that are designed to strengthen partnerships and enhance visitor mobility throughout the city. A particular emphasis was placed on transportation connectivity, including continued support for Bellhop and first-mile/last-mile services, especially in response to the expansion of regional transit infrastructure. The organization is committed to maintaining and expanding the mobile welcome center program in recognition of the need to deliver information directly to visitors at events and high-traffic locations rather than relying on a single fixed site.

Brad Jones announced a plan to replace the existing welcome center unit in 2027 through a shared funding arrangement with BCCA and the TPA. The goal is to introduce updated technology and features that are aligned with evolving transportation and sustainability priorities.

Meredith Langridge presented additional initiatives to expand visitor engagement and improve access to destination information. New digital visitor kiosks will be expanded to include additional hotel locations. There is interest in also exploring outdoor installations to reach a broader audience. Continued investment in outdoor tourism and recreational programming was also highlighted, including activation of major trail systems and waterfront developments intended to enhance the visitor experience and support year-round tourism activity.

Transportation partnerships remain a central focus. There has been progress made in airport shuttle services, and new efforts are under way to develop cruise-related transportation options designed to capture additional visitor demand from regional travel markets.

Kate Hudson suggested the potential placement of visitor kiosks at transit stations associated with the newly opened rail lines. Meredith Langridge confirmed that preliminary conversations with transit authorities have already begun. Further development of the concept could occur in the coming planning cycle.

Caroline Dermarkarian remarked that guests love the kiosks and asked if they can be used to book transportation services such as Bellhop or airport transfers directly. Meredith Langridge explained that while such functionality is desirable, it comes down to the issue of data privacy and security. It is not advisable to collect personal information through public kiosks. Instead, the system is designed to guide users to access booking services through their own personal devices, often by scanning a quick-response code. Brad Jones added that emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, may soon provide enhanced capabilities that could safely support more integrated booking functions in the future. Meredith Langridge said recent improvements made to the kiosk system include the addition of multiple language options to better accommodate international visitors and improve accessibility.

Cassandra Leiberman asked about the timeline for launching the cruise transportation program. Brad Jones said the program is set for launch in 2026. Meredith Langridge said it is in its initial phase and is focused on establishing service offerings, marketing the product, and building relationships with partners and vendors. Brad Jones added that the existing transportation fleets will be used in the early stages with the goal of developing a dedicated fleet as the program matures in the following planning cycle.

Meredith Langridge said the airport shuttle service currently serves nine hotels and is in the process of expanding to additional locations. The cruise transportation service will be particularly beneficial because its on-demand structure will allow it to serve all hotels in the area, thereby distributing opportunities more equitably across the hospitality sector.

Brad Jones said a strategic plan for Bellhop is being worked on. The demand for the service continues to grow significantly and the long-term sustainability of the program will require

broader community participation and funding support of around \$3 million. While the organization remains committed to ensuring that hotels continue to receive reliable service, the program delivery models may evolve as the service expands to meet residential and workforce needs. Visit Bellevue will need to be at the table, but it may also need to get out of the way in favor of collaboration with multiple agencies and stakeholders and support by a substantial community-level budget.

Meredith Langridge described the ongoing grant programs that support tourism-related events that are aligned with the destination development strategy, including an incubator program that typically supports several festivals and community events each year. Culinary tourism initiatives were also highlighted, with multiple culinary-themed events and promotional programs planned annually to strengthen the destination's appeal to food-focused travelers.

Answering a question asked by Cassandra Leiberman, Meredith Langridge explained that while some events may receive support over multiple years, the application process is being adjusted to require annual review in order to ensure continued program effectiveness and accountability.

Meredith Langridge shared with the group the performance goals related to visitor experience and community engagement. The objectives outlined included expanding the distribution of visitor surveys; increasing participation in mobile welcome center services and continuing to grow usage of the transportation and information programs such as Bellhop, the airport shuttle, and the digital kiosks.

Caroline Dermarkarian asked about the survey metrics, particularly the target percentage of visitors who will recommend the destination to others. Meredith Langridge clarified that the goal is to increase the proportion of respondents who strongly recommend the destination.

Destination Stewardship and Community Relations director Megan Adams outlined the department's core focus areas of sustainability, accessibility, and community engagement, all of which are intended to strengthen the destination's brand while enhancing the visitor experience. One significant initiative involves a partnership with a sustainability certification organization to verify environmentally responsible practices among local hotels. There are plans to expand certification efforts to restaurants, attractions, and other partners in 2027. The broader verification process is intended not only to demonstrate environmental responsibility but also to support marketing efforts that position the destination as a sustainable community.

Megan Adams highlighted the ongoing accessibility initiatives implemented through collaboration with Wheel the World, an international verification program designed to improve travel experiences for individuals with disabilities. The efforts are expected to generate increased visitation and measurable economic impact as accessibility improvements become more widely promoted. Also discussed were communication strategies, including the development of a locally focused podcast called Bellevue Bound designed to inform hospitality professionals, residents, and visitors about attractions, events, and community contributors. The Bellevue Cares program is a local version of a corporate social responsibility initiative. It enables visiting groups to participate in charitable activities, donations, or team-building programs that support local nonprofit organizations. The program is both a community benefit and a value-added experience for conference and group travelers.

With regard to cultural and community development efforts, Megan Adams emphasized the importance of arts, culture, and multicultural engagement in attracting visitors and encouraging longer stays.

There are numerous community organizations focused on creating fantastic community experiences for both locals and visitors. One mission of Visit Bellevue is to make those offerings easier to access. The initiatives are supported through ongoing collaboration with local businesses and community organizations through networking and educational programs designed to strengthen partnerships and provide resources to stakeholders throughout the hospitality sector.

Megan Adams stressed the importance of local businesses and promoting the work they are doing through continued growth in podcast engagement; increased participation by visiting groups in charitable programs; expansion of accessibility verification among partner organizations; and broader sustainability certification across restaurants and attractions. In 2027 the goal is to see ten percent of the groups coming to Bellevue participating in Bellevue Cares in some way and generating revenue for local non-profits. The Wheel the World program plans to identify ten new partners in 2027 in the hope of seeing a ten percent increase in ADA-related bookings. The Green Key Global hotel verifications relative to sustainability will happen in 2026; by 2027 the goal is to see 20 verified restaurants and attractions.

Caroline Dermarkarian asked for additional insights regarding the Bellevue Cares corporate social responsibility program, and asked whether materials were available for distribution to event planners. Brad Jones confirmed that the program is already operational and accessible through the organization's website, and further proposed providing a dedicated presentation at a future meeting to ensure stakeholders receive a comprehensive overview of program features and participation opportunities.

Brad Jones provided additional updates on recent program successes and future collaborative initiatives. Sustained investment in accessibility initiatives have begun to generate measurable recognition, including an upcoming feature highlighting the destination as a model community in AARP, a national publication. In addition, it was announced that there are plans to establish a hospitality sustainability think tank composed of industry partners. The initiative is intended to identify practical sustainability resources; build a shared knowledge base for local businesses; and encourage continuous improvement across the hospitality sector through collaboration with an external organization that will help guide the effort.

With regard to the budget, Brad Jones explained that overall it will remain flat compared with the prior year, which reflects a deliberate effort to stabilize financial planning following earlier revenue shortfalls. The gross budget is projected at just over \$3 million dollars, with net expenditures slightly below that amount after accounting for administrative fees. Prior adjustments to programming levels enabled the organization to build a substantial contingency reserve, which allows for a reduction in the contingency allocation from five percent to two percent moving forward. Although total revenue projections will remain unchanged for the coming year, the reallocation of contingency funds will permit a modest increase in certain program expenditures, particularly within marketing and communications, while most other operational categories will remain consistent with the previous year.

Cassandra Leiberman asked if there is normally a line item for reserves. Brad Jones said the term is contingency. Lorie Hoffman added that the reserves referred to are in the account that is not budgeted. The contingency is budgeted and can be accessed by the administrators if needed throughout the year. Additional details about the reserve balances will be presented at a subsequent meeting.

****BREAK****

Kristina Hudson outlined the mission of the OneRedmond organization, emphasizing its commitment to supporting the hotel and tourism industry through collaborative programs

designed to increase overnight stays. The tourism initiative was established relatively recently with funding from the TPA and represents an early stage in a longer-term development process aligned with the city's strategic plan, which includes the potential formation of a formal Destination Management Organization in future years. The upcoming planning period represents the fourth year of program implementation. The operations are supported by a small team of staff members and contractors responsible for executing specialized tourism initiatives.

Audrey Fan outlined the key strategic priorities and program areas designed to attract visitors in the absence of large indoor venues or major convention facilities and stressed the importance of developing niche tourism offerings tailored to the community's strengths, including wellness programming such as nature-based experiences, pet-friendly travel initiatives, and partnerships related to regional wine tourism. Continued collaboration with regional entertainment venues and outdoor attractions was identified as a central component of the strategy, along with exploration of new opportunities in youth sports, festivals, and other events capable of generating overnight stays. Additional priorities include sustained investment in marketing, public relations, and data-driven performance measures to improve the effectiveness of promotional campaigns. Regional cooperation with neighboring jurisdictions is important and there will be ongoing efforts to identify creative tourism solutions that can support economic growth despite infrastructure limitations.

With regard to the budget, Kristina Hudson said OneRedmond has also chosen to be conservative. The revenue projections are based on 2025 to ensure stability, though the draft budget does include a significant draw on the reserve funds in order to accommodate requests from the city and to meet the needs of local hotels. Among the requests is a proposed transportation initiative similar in concept to existing mobility programs; it will require a significant allocation of funds.

Audrey Fan focused on the projections for marketing and communications expenditures and explained that for 2027 the organization will continue the focus on data-informed promotional strategies, building on the performance data collected in prior years to better understand visitor behavior and economic impact. The planned investments include contracted marketing services; targeted advertising campaigns; website and content development; and expanded social media outreach designed to amplify the destination's visibility across priority markets. The initiatives were described as essential to strengthening brand recognition and ensuring the flexibility to adapt messaging and program content as tourism programs evolve.

Kristina Hudson shifted to tourism development and program implementation efforts and outlined plans to maintain participation in professional conferences and industry events to monitor emerging trends and to build relationships with tourism partners. The budget includes funding to support the continuation and refinement of niche tourism initiatives, including nature-based wellness programming and other specialized experiences designed to differentiate the destination within the regional market. Strategic partnerships with entertainment venues, cultural organizations, and regional attractions were identified as critical components of the tourism strategy, along with investments in signage and wayfinding infrastructure to support visitor navigation and enhance the overall travel experience.

Kristina Hudson explained that the proposed funding will support expanded mobility options for visitors, including rideshare coordination and transit access initiatives that connect hotels with transportation networks and nearby attractions. The proposed transportation allocation represents the largest change within the budget and is acknowledged as a prime factor contributing to the projected reduction in the reserve balances. Including the item in the draft budget is intended to prompt discussion among stakeholders regarding the long-term viability

and performance of transportation services and their role in supporting visitor satisfaction and hotel occupancy.

Kristina Hudson said the festivals, events, and destination sales initiatives are aimed at supplementing the existing grant programs administered by the city of Redmond, thus enabling the tourism program to provide additional financial support for major events that generate overnight stays. Destination sales funding will also support participation in trade shows, sales missions and site visits designed to attract group business to local hotels. The investments were framed as targeted measures to expand the destination's reach among meeting planners and event organizers while strengthening collaboration with regional tourism partners.

Audrey Fan briefly reviewed the administrative and financial management practices associated with the tourism program and explained that the operational expenses reflect the responsibilities of managing a comprehensive program that includes staffing, technology, and financial oversight. To ensure accountability, the program utilizes external bookkeeping and accounting services; conducts financial reviews; and maintains ongoing investment in research and data analysis to support evidence-based decision-making.

Kristina Hudson shared with the group a chart outlining the budget and program focus for each quarter in 2027. Also shared was the draft budget showing the proposed structure, projected revenue levels, and the program expenditures across key operational categories. The document included the ten percent contingency and the eight percent reserve draw consistent with the prior planning practices.

Lorie Hoffman stressed that the reserve levels are determined by the governing board each year and can be adjusted based on financial conditions and program priorities.

Cassandra Leiberman sought clarification regarding the reserve and contingency funds for the Bellevue and Redmond zones. Lorie Hoffman explained that the Bellevue program currently maintains a substantial reserve balance and is not planning any additional contributions to it within the upcoming budget cycle. For both zones, any surplus revenues beyond the projected expenses will be deposited into the reserve at year's end. Kristina Hudson added that the Redmond program is continuing to budget an annual contribution to reserves consistent with prior board direction. Audrey Fan stressed that the financial allocations remain subject to board oversight and may be adjusted in response to changing fiscal conditions or program priorities.

Cassandra Leiberman suggested that a reserve of \$97,526 at the end of 2027 for the Redmond zone seems a little low. Kristina Hudson voiced support for Redlink along with other stakeholders in Redmond, though more needs to be understood about it. There is an additional eight percent contribution that is not reflected because the funds cannot be used in 2027. Funds will not be shifted from one program to another. The inclusion of the transportation initiatives accounts for the anticipated reduction in reserves by the end of the planning period. The proposed budget was intentionally structured to include potential collaborative opportunities, allowing the board to evaluate program priorities before finalizing spending decisions.

Caroline Dermarkarian voiced the understanding that 2026 was the year for Redmond to build and put programs in place, and that 2027 would not see large expenses for research and studies. Kristina Hudson said the increase is tied to the ACH fee, a new line item not included in previous budgets.

Caroline Dermarkarian asked if 2026 is projected to be a better year than 2025. Audrey Fan explained that the revenue projections were intentionally conservative in line with uncertainty in the travel industry and the potential influence of external economic conditions on business travel demand. While the early performance indicators suggest positive occupancy trends, it makes sense to be cautious given the ongoing global and domestic developments that could affect travel patterns throughout the year. The organization is focusing on expanding niche tourism programs such as wellness, experiential travel, and family-oriented activities to attract regional visitors even during periods of reduced corporate travel. The initiatives are supported by emerging tourism trend data that indicates an increased demand for experiential and wellness-focused travel experiences. The year 2026 will likely be much the same as 2025, but the goal is to achieve more.

Caroline Dermarkarian indicated a level of unease about the reserve draw down to such a low level and encouraged identifying potential cost savings or program adjustments that could preserve financial stability. Audrey Fan acknowledged the concern and explained that the draft budget is intentionally designed to include a comprehensive set of potential initiatives. The expectation is that some items could be scaled back if necessary once the priorities are finalized. The approach is a strategy to ensure that opportunities for collaboration and program development are fully considered before final budget adoption.

Cassandra Leiberman suggested making enhancements to the organizational chart by including staff names, and providing additional explanatory context for certain niche tourism initiatives to improve stakeholder understanding.

Nate Moore commended the staff for their outreach efforts and successful collaboration with local hotels, noting that many initiatives have already produced tangible benefits at the operational level.

B. Action – Chair and Vice Chair Election

Caroline Dermarkarian explained that the selection process would follow the procedures outlined in parliamentary rules and clarified that nominations did not require a second and that voting would occur in the order nominations were received. The floor was opened for nominations for the position of Chair.

Caroline Dermarkarian nominated Wade Hashimoto to serve as Chair.

There were no other nominations made.

Wade Hashimoto was elected Chair by unanimous vote.

A motion to extend the meeting by five minutes was made by Caroline Dermarkarian. The motion was seconded by Kate Hudson and the motion carried unanimously.

Kate Hudson self-nominated to serve as Vice Chair.

There were no other nominations made.

Kate Hudson was elected to serve as Vice Chair by unanimous vote.

5. COMMISSION QUICK BUSINESS – None

6. REPORTS – None

7. ADJOURNMENT

Caroline Dermarkarian adjourned the meeting at 3:00 p.m.