1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:02 p.m. by Chair Mercer who presided.

2. ROLL CALL

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioners Kline and Perelman, both of whom were excused.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. February 21, 2018

A motion to approve the minutes as submitted was made by Commissioner Piper. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Oxrieder and the motion carried without dissent; Commissioners McEachran and Ma abstained.

4. PETITIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS – None
5. STAFF AND COMMISSION REPORTS

Commissioner McEachran stated that he was impressed by the brochure titled *Bellevue By the Numbers*. He said it is very well done.

Commissioner McEachran also noted that he had been asked to serve on the interview team for the new fire chief.

Human Services Manager Alex O’Reilly reported that she, Grant Coordinator Dee Dee Catalano and Human Services Planner Christy Stangland attended a recent meeting of the South, North and East King County funders. She said following the meeting she was contacted by the human services manager for Burien who had just seen the *Bellevue By the Numbers* brochure and indicated they would like to do something similar. Ms. O’Reilly said she put her in touch with Bellevue’s Neighborhood Outreach division.

6. DISCUSSION

A. Transportation Listening Session – King County Metro

Ms. Stangland said the discussion was intended to serve as an opportunity for King County Metro to hear the concerns of the Commission and the Network on Aging. After reviewing the ground rules for the session, she explained that King County Metro would return on April 3 to present the results of the survey, to review the observations of the Commission and the Network on Aging, and to work on the development of a needs statement. A date in May will also be selected for Metro to present their solution concept. Also in May Metro’s pilot project proposal will be finalized.

Don Okazaki with King County Metro said the electronic survey was live between February 16 and March 16. It took longer than anticipated to translate the survey so that version was only online for two weeks. Metro will take the data and look for the trends, then at the meeting in early April will discuss the results and the draft needs statements.

Ms. Tan said she attended the senior fair and passed out a lot of the surveys. She said from what she has been hearing, there are two primary concerns: the lack of parking at the park and ride lots, and the lack of affordable transportation options.

Ms. Leigh said she is a resident of the Lakemont area. She said at one point there was a bus that went down Lakemont Boulevard and served those wanting to get to Eastgate. The bus did not run all day but it was a valuable service that ceased around 2013. Mr. Okazaki said the bus operated as a peak hour service. Ms. Leigh said there has been a lot of condominium and apartment development in the neighborhood, growth that could benefit from having the service. There should be a nexus between the permitting process for new housing units and planning for
transportation services. Mr. Okazaki explained that the route cutting that occurred during that period were based on actual ridership. He said he would raise with the Metro transportation planners the fact that more people are now living along that route.

Mr. Twiss commented that an incredible number of new housing units are being built on the Eastside. He said he questioned whether or not the infrastructure is in place to support the growth, and whether the developers are required to deal with infrastructure concerns relative to roads, power and other utilities, and transportation options.

Chair Mercer said she lives in Somerset and during the first couple of years of high school for her daughter she tried to depend on the bus to get to and from school. Often the bus would be late, would simply not show up or would otherwise pass by. The lack of consistency meant taking the bus could not be considered a reliable option. Mr. Okazaki said the dependability of routes is measured by Metro based on on-time performance. Like other transit agencies, Metro struggles to run its routes on time, something that is difficult in areas that are as congested as King County is. Metro used to have long routes that have since been truncated precisely to improve on-time performance. Shorter routes are far more manageable from a time perspective. Where buses are found to be unreliable generally, complaints should be forwarded to Metro. He added that over the past two years there has been a shortage of drivers, a fact that has complicated the issue and that has on occasion necessitated the canceling of routes for a day or so. Where service is unreliable, people choose not to use the service, which leads to a drop in the number of riders and possibly cancellation of routes.

Ms. Kimball said she reviewed about 50 of the surveys that came in to the North Bellevue Community Center and observed the themes mentioned by Ms. Tan. She said from the surveys it was clear that the respondents think the Metro system is hard to figure out. Mr. Okazaki agreed and said that is why free bus travel training sessions are offered at places like Hopelink.

Ms. Loffing said the bus travel training sessions offered at Hopelink are mostly for immigrants, seniors and people with disabilities. The training is offered by Metro. Mr. Okazaki said Sound Generations works with a number of community service agencies in providing videos on how to take the bus. He said Metro understands that the system is confusing, which is why it is working to simplify it through single fares rather than multiple fares.

Ms. Kimball pointed out that there are a lot of older adults in the city of Bellevue, some of whom are fast approaching the point where they cannot, will not or should not drive. For them to maintain some manner of independent living, they need transportation options. Services like Envoy America and GoGo Grandparent are quite expensive and out of reach for many. What is needed are routes that differ from the commuter and student routes by going into the neighborhoods and offering
reasonable access. Mr. Okazaki stated that Uber and Lyft are significantly less expensive than cabs, but those not familiar with or without access to technology are generally left out.

Ms. Stangland said in her work with service agencies she encountered the trend that Metro does not adequately meet the needs of older adults and people with special needs.

Ms. Kimball added that some older citizens are reluctant to ride the bus, and even less reluctant to take Uber or Lyft because they are afraid of riding with strangers.

Ms. Tan shared the story of a gentleman in his late 80s who lives in an assisted living facility that provides transportation to residents. She said his wife of 60 years had Alzheimer's and had to be moved to an adult family home, putting them two and a half miles apart. His daughter took his car keys from him and the only way he can travel to see his wife is by being dependent on the community shuttle, which cannot accommodate him every day, thus he can only see his wife twice a week. He cannot access Uber or Lyft because he does not have a smart phone, and even if he did he could not afford the additional three trips per week he would like to make. Ms. Kimball added that there are many seniors who do not qualify as low-income but who do not have enough money to be able to afford a for-hire service two or three times a week.

Mr. Twiss said the volunteer driver system offered by Senior Services was huge. The service is now offered by Sound Generations. Mr. Okazaki pointed out that while the service is available, it is for medical trips only.

Mr. Lassiter said he manages the North Bellevue Community Center and used to manage the Highland Community Center. He said he along with Ms. Kimball sat down with a group after the survey came out and what should have taken 15 minutes took over an hour because of a lack of understanding of the concepts presented, even though the survey was in their language and an interpreter was present. Another group wanted nothing at all to do with the survey. An elderly lady who visits the North Bellevue Community Center every day gets there by taking the bus, but has indicated that in order to go shopping she relies on a volunteer to drive her. She does not have the mental capability relative to problem solving needed to fill out the survey. He said from just those examples it is clear that not every group is being heard from through the survey. Mr. Okazaki said Metro had heard before that its surveys are generally geared to higher functioning, English-speaking persons. There have been attempts made to visit senior centers to verbally present surveys and those efforts have been fruitful. Caregivers are often relied on to fill out surveys on behalf of those unable to do so themselves.

Ms. Smilen said the need of seniors for transportation in their fight against loss is neither friendly nor easy. She said John was a professor at one time, had hip surgery recently, and has a daughter who is sick and tired of helping him. He must depend on volunteers to get from place to place. He lives alone and takes pride in maintaining
his own home, but he needs help. Once he gets to a department store he has many choices he can make, which is a big deal for him. The elderly often have choice taken away from them as others make choices for them. While shopping he can chat with people, and that can make his day in an otherwise lonely existence. Transportation is needed and relying on volunteers does not always work. She said she volunteered to help her friend Jan who in turn took advantage of her and had her running all over the place all the time. The friendship ended and Jan had to turn to other choices, something that was hard for her to do. John wants to teach a course, but getting there with some regularity is difficult and if cannot always show up he will be branded a teacher who cannot be relied upon. The money from teaching the course would not be much but it would be helpful.

Continuing, Ms. Smilen said her friend Jean who inadvertently hit the accelerator instead of the brake and ran into her own garage. She decided then not to drive anymore. When a senior stops driving, their independence is taken away from them. Jean now must depend on transportation that is not always reliable. She is in her 80s and does not have a smart phone. People in their 60s, who are also referred to as seniors, are usually more able to navigate the digital world, but those in their 80s are more afraid of smart phones and often have difficulty even in operating a stupid phone because their eyesight is not good. Reading a bus schedule can be difficult because it may not make sense to them. Schedules also change and even if they make it to the bus stop there may not be a bus. Another friend met with that situation. She used a walker to get around and after shopping had a number of bags with her, which threw her balance off when using the walker. The bus did not show up and she had to call a cab, which cost her $50. Seniors need more choices, whether they are 50 or 85. For those who cannot get out of their houses because of transportation issues find that loneliness can set in. They often start not caring about or for themselves and they can die as a result. Transportation is the key to keep seniors active, social and living.

Mr. Okazaki said he understands those issues. He said his mother is 95 and he and his two siblings each take her out once a week. He said he works diligently to find funding for the services seniors need, as well as services needed by the homeless. A lack of funding is a perennial problem even as the needs grow as more seniors live in place and more persons with disabilities live independently.

Ms. Tan commented that one mission of the Network on Aging is to ensure seniors are able to age in place in their own homes. She asked if Metro has demographic information showing where seniors live in Bellevue. Mr. Okazaki said Metro has access to census data. A number of studies have come out that say the senior population will continue to grow as a percentage of the overall population. King County and transportation providers are aware of the need, but they need seniors to speak up and make their needs known.

Commissioner McEachran agreed that policymakers are not hearing the narrative. There are all kinds of issues and transportation is high on the list. Access equals
equity. More than just survey results and census data is needed. There needs to be a policy level discussion. Mr. Okazaki agreed but pointed out that seeds can be planted anywhere and grow into something significant. The Cap program that started 20 years ago with two vans now has 140 vans. That program began at the bottom and has grown but slowly. Programs that grow from the top grow faster. The input from the Commission and the Network on Aging is vitally important and will lead to good things. A pilot project is going to be launched, and the louder the voice the bigger the pilot will be.

Commissioner Ma said he often sees patients who have a difficult time making it into the medical center. Many of them can drive but choose to avoid freeways and areas with heavy traffic, and choose to not drive all that often. He said he would like to see those types of people given access, possibly at a park and ride lot, to transportation services that would take them where they need to go.

Chair Mercer said she has heard from the homeless and shift workers the need for transportation options during off times. Many have jobs that require leaving early on a Saturday and they find few transportation options, especially if they are staying in a rotating homeless shelter. The main routes may have buses running all day, but not frequently, and the smaller feeder routes often have no buses at all during the off hours.

Commissioner McEachran said he has heard similar comments from the people who work services late night at Bellevue College. When working to 2:00 a.m. they cannot find a ride home. Even students who have late classes and miss a bus face the same outcome.

Commissioner Piper said the last mile issue is of great importance. The issue affects every day commuters as well as students, older residents and others. Mr. Okazaki said Metro is currently looking at pilot options, including in Eastgate, that will focus on first mile/last mile issues. Instead of having people drive to the Eastgate park and ride, where there is no place to park, they are trying to figure out ways to use services like Uber and Lyft to get riders to the facility where they can access a bus. The big issue, of course, is cost. Metro focuses its funding first on the primary lines, and as it gets more money it can focus on the feeder options.

Chair Mercer suggested service to outlying areas could be provided by having a fleet of vans rather than large buses available on demand. Mr. Okazaki said Metro is looking into things like that. He added that the problem with on-demand services is that they will see only two or three riders per hour, whereas an actual route will see 40 or more per hour. He said the future likely will involve partnerships with services like Uber and Lyft that subsidize rides to get people to a park and ride or other bus connection. The homeless population represents another whole issue, one that few cities are looking into.
Commissioner Oxrieder said during a visit to Jewish Family Service there was talk of helping people to find jobs, but it was noted that those people often have difficulty in getting to those jobs, particularly during late night hours.

Mr. Twiss said during his tenure with Senior Services, United Way decided not to fund the program, which proved to be a huge loss. The reason given was the donors did not want to fund senior services, rather they wanted to focus on services for children and the homeless. To some degree, funding follows visibility. He said he did not know where the needs of seniors fit at the local and county government levels. Mr. Okazaki said at the end of the process there may be pilot projects that could be recommended to go along with a request. The organized effort of the Commission and the Network on Aging could yield results. All options should be considered, including piggybacking onto programs that are already in place, such as the Solid Ground circulator, and products and services like free Orca passes.

Ms. Leigh said one thing she would like to see was navigators hired to go from place to place where there are large numbers of seniors, like grocery stores, to ask them specifically about the services they need and where they should be provided. Mr. Okazaki said that was a good idea. Metro at one time had a traveling ambassador program that involved training the staff at libraries, community centers and senior centers. The ambassadors could be asked any question about transportation services and they could quickly look up answers. The website findaride.org, which Metro is working to improve, can offer suggestions based on input from users relative to where they live and where they want to go. The problem, however, is that the suggestions always seem to come back to the same things: Metro, Access, Catholic Community Services and Sound Generations.

Chair Mercer said she would love to see some tech solutions identified that would work for everyone. One option might be to create loops for Uber and Lyft to follow connecting people to major destinations. The approach could also be right for on-demand.

Ms. Stangland said anyone with suggestions ahead of the next meeting should feel free to email her. She said she would pass on all suggestions to Mr. Okazaki.

7. DISCUSSION

A. Affordable Housing Update

Associate Planner Janet Lewine noted that the last update regarding affordable housing was provided to the Commission in September 2016. At that point staff was optimistically promoting the objectives for what was to be accomplished with the affordable housing strategies. The technical advisory group had been appointed and was working to develop strategies and actions. The Council adopted an affordable housing strategy in June 2017 and in August of that same year staff presented to the Council a work program focused on the actions in the strategy.
Ms. Lewine said business and community interests have expressed concerns about affordable housing. The Needs Update has consistently rated affordable housing near the top of the list of community problems. In the 2017 version of the document, 77 percent of survey respondents rated the lack of affordable housing as the top community problem. The business survey conducted in 2017 found that all business sectors rate Bellevue low on affordable housing options, and noted that workforce housing is a primary challenge. Forty-one percent of the respondents reported having experienced trouble finding and keeping trained and qualified staff because of a lack of affordable housing; that figure was higher for retail and tourism workers.

Baristas, grocery clerks, cooks, customer service representatives, bookkeepers and medical assistants earn between $15 and $20 per hour, an income that means they can afford rents of between $800 and $1000 per month. Nearly half of the overall workforce cannot afford to live in Bellevue. The current median rent in Bellevue is $1960 for a one-bedroom unit and $2180 for a two-bedroom unit. Just over 9000 Bellevue households, or 22,000 people, earn less than 50 percent of area median income. However, there are only 3100 units, about six percent of the total stock, that are affordable to that income group, leaving a gap of some 6000 units affordable to the current low-income population. Countywide the gap is closer to 8500 units.

Ms. Lewine said the Council adopted five strategies and 21 actions in June 2017 with the goal of achieving 2500 more affordable homes within ten years. The Council directed staff to take bold actions that will translate into measurable results, and prioritized certain actions to be addressed in the first phase. The five strategies were: 1) Help people stay in affordable housing; 2) Create a variety of housing choices; 3) Create more affordable housing; 4) Unlock the housing supply by making it easier to build; and 5) prioritize state, county and local funding for affordable housing.

The two-phase work program initiated by the Council involves actions to be taken immediately and actions that will kick in after the biennium budget process. The immediate actions include several jump-start actions, and exploring potential budget proposals, while in the second phase the actions include legislative advocacy and actions that will require increased resources, additional lead time or more coordination with partners.

One the jump-start actions has already been completed, namely updating the multifamily tax exemption. The exemption, adopted a couple of years ago, is an incentive for developers that provides a 12-year tax exemption. Since being adopted in Bellevue, the exemption has only been used once. The program is popular in Seattle, and in Redmond six developers took advantage of it within one month of the exemption being approved in that city. The affordability levels for Bellevue’s exemption have been adjusted, but it will require a concerted effort to make sure developers know about the option. Comprehensive Planning Manager Terry Cullen said there is a developer in the process of applying for the exemption for a project.
Ms. Lewine said the jump-start action for downtown and Eastgate involves voluntary density incentives in mixed use areas. There are density incentives in place in Bel-Red that are working fairly well. The incentives adopted for the downtown and Eastgate are not quite as robust but it is hoped that as redevelopment occurs in Eastgate affordable units will be mixed with market-rate units. Incentives are being developed for the Wilburton and East Main areas.

There are opportunities for transit-oriented developments on Sound Transit surplus properties close to the light rail stations being developed in Bel-Red. The city is working on a conveyance agreement with Sound Transit to take position of the three acres north of the 130th station on which there will be structured parking and room for transit-oriented development with an affordable housing element. A similar project will be going through on another surplus property near the Operations and Maintenance Facility Eastside site in Bel-Red.

Ms. Lewine stated that non-profit housing developers are not going to develop in Bellevue with the market price of land. If land for affordable housing projects cannot be found through surplusing or partnerships with faith groups and non-profits, it will not be economically possible to develop affordable housing in Bellevue. That underscores the need to preserve all existing affordable housing units in the city.

On the issue of how to get affordable land available to non-profit housing providers, Ms. Lewine noted that there have been successful projects brought online in partnership with the faith community. Those projects, however, required a rather long process to gain the density needed by the non-profits looking to build them, which is usually 40 to 50 units minimum. Both the St. Margaret and St. Luke properties had to get a rezone, which was only possible by first going through the Comprehensive Plan amendment process. Under the affordable housing strategy, the city wants to see partnerships work and also wants to make them easier to work. One idea floated was to retain the current zoning but allow a density increase by waiving the dwelling units per acre requirement, which for some properties almost doubles the total number of units. The TAG saw the approach as one of its bold actions with the potential of achieving 200 to 1000 affordable units over ten years. To use the option, affordability would be tagged at the 50 percent of area median income level.

The Comprehensive Plan amendment and Land Use Code amendment process is not predictable for the neighborhoods, the landowners and the non-profit organizations, nor is it efficient. The bonus option would be far more predictable. It would only apply to properties owned by non-profits, a faith community or the public which are already zoned for multifamily for commercial. It would waive the density cap requirement and instead measure density by Floor/Area Ratio, which is the ratio of building to land. Mr. Cullen added that under the FAR approach everything is defined by the building envelope that can fit within the required setbacks and height restrictions. Even with properties that are located in residential areas screened out and focusing primarily on properties on transit lines or close to employment centers, a considerable number of additional units can be developed.
Chair Mercer pointed out that many neighborhoods are already complaining about transportation and infrastructure. She said there is a tension between the need for affordable housing and the need for people to get to their neighborhoods and she asked how the strategies address those concerns. Ms. Lewine said staff has gone through all of the parcels in the city to determine which ones would qualify, then the identified properties were reviewed in more depth to determine which ones might actually use the strategy based on land value versus improvement value, and the amount of excess property. The properties that might use the strategy, all of which are sites zoned multifamily or commercial, were mapped and found to be mostly along transit lines. Staff believes the impact of the added density can be planned for and absorbed.

Mr. Cullen added that under the State Environmental Protection Act all development actions are required to analyze the transportation impacts as a whole. He said affordable housing is always a challenge relative to transportation, character, and who will occupy the units. Those concerns make it imperative to work with the neighborhoods to identify the face of affordable housing, which includes nurses, schoolteachers, firefighters and police officers. Many confuse affordable housing with the homeless and believe that 40 or 50 units constitutes a housing project reflective of the old urban renewal days. Public relations is clearly a big part of the strategy required to make it all work.

Commissioner Ma said he heard that in Kirkland a neighborhood pushed back against an affordable housing project because they thought it would lower their housing values and asked if there has been similar pushback in Bellevue. Ms. Lewine said there has been pushback on projects that are adjacent to single family neighborhoods, and for projects in areas where there are concentrations of affordable housing units. Staff works well with the non-profit housing partners who work closely with the neighborhoods to address concerns. Imagine Housing and the King County Housing Authority have very good records in that regard.

Commissioner Oxrieder asked if anyone has seen their property value reduced due to an affordable housing project. Ms. Lewine said that has not been seen. Mr. Cullen said Bellevue has experienced a very long economic upswing and many are tired of growth. Anything that feeds into growth raises eyebrows on the part of residents.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Oxrieder, Ms. Lewine said she hoped that regionally there will be more houses brought online to give people housing choices, including in Bellevue so that people can live close to where they work and their children can take advantage of Bellevue’s good schools. Currently the pressure is extreme given the jobs/housing imbalance and the imbalance between wages and housing costs.

Ms. Stangland asked how Bellevue works with other cities in the area relative to affordable housing. Ms. Lewine said Bellevue was a founding member of ARCH in
the early 1990s. Fifteen Eastside cities contribute to ARCH to fund opportunities for affordable housing as they become available. While the ARCH funds do not represent a large pool, it is a pool that shows community support. The city is also working with King County to development a regional affordable housing strategy; with the One Table regional work group that is seeking ways to slow the flow into homelessness; and with the All Home program aimed at ending homelessness.

Ms. Tan asked about affordable housing for seniors. Ms. Lewine explained that the ARCH fund has target goals that include senior housing along with homeless and special needs housing. The goals do not have to be achieved every funding round but they are to be achieved over time. There are also specific actions to support seniors in aging in place, including home repair programs and tax exemptions for senior low-income housing at the state level. The legislature also recently removed the cap on the recording fee and removed the sunset, approved funding for the state Housing Trust Fund, and expanded the lodging tax to include Airbnb and the like. About $10 million of the lodging tax has been earmarked for the Bel-Red area and other transit-oriented developments.

Ms. Foster asked about the city’s accessory dwelling unit standards. Ms. Lewine said the city has for many years allowed attached accessory dwelling units but not detached accessory dwelling units. Consideration is being given to changing the code to allow detached units. In the past the subject has triggered all manner of reactions from Bellevue residents and the intent is to go neighborhood by neighborhood seeking comment and direction, the result of which may be a code that allows detached units in some neighborhoods but not in others. Ms. Foster suggested it will take showing people what it looks like, because people do not know what they do not know. They can imagine something that will be an eyesore, or something that will double density in a neighborhood. Ms. Lewine said the code includes a number of limits on size and parking and other factors that are aimed at addressing concerns.

Ms. Lewine explained that as soon as the conveyance document is in hand for the 130th property, the city will issue an RFP seeking a non-profit and private housing developers about development of the site. Sound Transit will be operating the surplus parcels at the OMFE site and they will be sending out an RFP at about the same time.

Ms. Lewine added that the city intends to further community and stakeholder outreach efforts to let people know generally about the affordable housing strategy and the actions that are going on. As each action gets rolled out there will be a unique program carried to the residents. A system will be put in place to monitor progress and success both in implementing actions and how those actions are resulting in affordable housing units.

Commissioner McEachran said one thing the TAG struggled with was the idea of community engagement on multiple levels, particularly relative to watching for common language. The folks in Wilburton are asking where affordable housing will
come from and how it will impact those who have held land for more than a hundred years. He encouraged the staff to consider forming a team of people to look for common language in the neighborhoods. Clear communication will be critical, particularly when it comes to explaining what affordable housing looks like. The pieces put together should also speak about supported housing. Mr. Cullen said consideration is being given to developing an instructional video to be posted to the city’s webpage and to be taken out to the communities. The overall affordable housing effort is huge and will require more than just the staff working on it, including the Commission.

Ms. Foster stressed the need to also share affordable housing success stories with the public.

8. OLD BUSINESS

Ms. Stangland gave a big thanks to the Network on Aging for their work on the transportation issues. She said of the 283 paper surveys that were filled out, the Network was responsible for 180 of them. The balance came from the providers.

Ms. O'Reilly informed the Commissioners that a workshop on the Land Use Code amendment related to the siting of a shelter was scheduled for April 3, which unfortunately is the same day as the Commission’s next meeting. It is anticipated that a couple of hundred people will attend. The meeting will begin at 5:30 p.m. and run to about 8:00 p.m. Informative materials will be posted soon to the city’s webpage. Ms. O'Reilly said she learned earlier in the day that on April 5 there will be two mini community workshops, one in the morning at Crossroads Community Center from 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. and the other at the South Bellevue Community Center from 5:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

Ms. Stangland asked any Commissioners with feedback about the bylaws to submit it to her by noon on March 21. She also reminded the Commissioners about the equity training session on March 28.

9. NEW BUSINESS – None

10. PETITIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS – None

11. ADJOURNMENT

A motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner McEachran. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Ma and the motion carried unanimously.
Chair Mercer adjourned the meeting at 8:09 p.m.

_________________________________________ _______________
Secretary to the Human Services Commission   Date

_________________________________________ _______________
Chairperson of the Human Services Commission  Date