

September 11, 2023

Bellevue City Council
City of Bellevue
450 110th Avenue NE
Bellevue, WA 98004

Re: File# 232-586

Opposition to Transportation Benefit District (TBD) Assumption & Proposed Sales Tax Increase

Mayor Robinson, Deputy Mayor Nieuwenhuis and Members of City Council,

I am writing on behalf of “Neighbors for a Livable Bellevue”, a large and growing coalition of Bellevue residents and business owners. We are expressing our opposition of the formation of the Transportation Benefit District, (TBD) and most importantly to the proposed increase in sales tax to fund deferred transportation maintenance requirements.¹

If approved, this will be the 4th tax Council approves without a public vote in 10 months including a 2% increase in property taxes.² In addition, these taxes are on top of pending transportation related parking fees, RPZ permit fees and the transportation tax levy approved in 2016.^{3, 4, 5} Further less than three years ago Council increased the sales tax to support affordable housing, also without voter approval.⁶

While we are in agreement on the need to address deferred transportation maintenance, we believe the formation of the TBD is inappropriate and not needed. According to staff the proposed tax is estimated to generate over \$10 million annually, yet only a small portion (30%) would fund deferred transportation maintenance. The majority (70%), would fund “ongoing capital programs”, projects yet to be undefined. Creating a \$7 million year slush fund with no constraints is not fiscally responsible nor does it appear to be in compliance with RCW 36.73 or BCC 4.22.^{7, 8}

Taxpayers need greater accountability and transparency on how their tax dollars are being spent. Simply approving another tax increase is not the answer. We are asking Council to apply fiscal governance and due diligence today and vote against the TBD. Fundamentally we do not believe it is appropriate to raise taxes to fund maintenance of the City’s roads and sidewalks. This should be the City’s first priority, not the last.

¹ Sept 9 Public Hearing <https://bellevue.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=6343222&GUID=33701C97-EB5C-4104-A228-42E406F75F6D>

² <https://bellevuewa.gov/city-news/council-roundup-2023-24-budget-approved>

³ Curb Management Plan <https://bellevuewa.gov/city-government/departments/transportation/planning/infrastructure-and-subareas/curb-management-plan>

⁴ 4.17.22 Comments to City Council https://www.agelight.com/files/ugd/7f6ade_291d99cb5fde4a63b7c837de1eca4962.pdf

⁵ 2016 Transportation Tax Levy <https://bellevuewa.gov/city-government/departments/transportation/projects/transportation-levy-projects>

⁶ Affordable Housing Sales Tax Approved Effective Jan 1, 2021 - <https://bellevuewa.gov/city-news/council-roundup-affordable-housing-sales-tax-approved-and-arts-survey-results>

⁷ RCW 36.73 <https://apps.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=36.73>

⁸ Bellevue City Code 4.22 <https://bellevue.municipal.codes/BCC/4.22/history>

As with any large budget, one needs to look internally before asking for more money and prioritize expenditures. Surely with a budget of \$2.2 billion, \$3 million can be found to support legitimate deferred maintenance priorities. If budgets cannot be adjusted and reallocated, funds should be re-allocated from existing city and department reserves totaling over \$49 million.⁹ Further, if reserves are not available, as a last resort, the TBD should only be approved to fund up to \$3 million dollars with a sunset clause of no longer than 24 months and extended only with voter approval.

Council has made positive steps to support affordable housing, but now needs to look at the bigger issue of affordable living. It is a recognized fact that sales taxes are regressive and will impact at-risk populations disproportionately.

While individually many of these tax increases may appear small, collectively they have a significant impact to a growing number of households who are one paycheck away from being unhoused. For seniors the collective impact risks their ability to age-in-place.

Continually increasing taxes cannot be the answer. Voters expect accountability, fiscal governance and transparency. Supporting the TBD fails on all counts. Approval of the TBD risks eroding public trust in the Council and the City's transportation department.

I look forward to working with Council and staff, to help prioritize funding and address the need for fiscal governance and discipline.

Respectfully,



Craig Spiegle

On behalf of Neighbors for a Livable Bellevue

<https://livablebellevue.com/>

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425-985-1421

Cc: Transportation Commission

Chris Long, Bellevue Transportation Department

⁹ City of Bellevue Annual Comprehensive Financial Report For the Fiscal Year Ended December 31, 2022
https://bellevuewa.gov/sites/default/files/media/pdf_document/2023/City%20of%20Bellevue%2C%20Washington%202022%20Annual%20Report.pdf

**Bellevue Residents Opposed to the
Formation of the Transportation Benefit District (TBD)
and Proposed Sales Tax Increase**

list as of 9/11/2023

- Lyn Adams
- Claire Almquist
- Hope Baker
- Anne Brastow
- Bill Brastow
- Julie Beffa
- Renay Bennett
- Louise Boothroyd
- Simon Boothroyd
- Pei-Chun Chen
- Alice Coday
- Anne Coughlin
- Stefan Damstrom
- Brianna Daniela
- Peter Daniela
- Heidi Dean
- Roy Dean
- Troy Hite
- Don Dickson
- Liz Dickson
- Erin Powell Dilloo
- Marielena Figueroa
- Brian Ferris
- Dana Gray
- Pete Gray
- Stephen Hall
- Warren Halverson
- Marriane Halverson
- Christie L Hammond
- Mike Hatmaker
- Steve Hiller
- Polly Hiller
- Ehab (Tony) Henein
- Sherry Henein
- Barbara Hughes
- Richard Hughes
- Larry James
- Robin Root James
- David Johnson
- Pam Johnson
- Mike Koehn
- Faye Kraft
- Nanette Lescher
- Don Marsh
- May Cay Murphy
- Ruby Okada
- Dr. Shannaz Rahman
- Lauren Rajwat
- Paresh Rajwat
- Danny Resnik
- Leslie Ritter
- Liz Shambaugh
- Jim Sinon
- Kate Sinon
- Craig Spieziele
- Alan W. Smith
- Joel Ulrich
- Linda Ulrich
- Albert Young
- Phyllis White
- Phil Yen
- Kevin Wallace
- Cheryl Wang
- Michelle Wannamaker
- Ching-Chao Wang
- Linda Wang
- Saijing Zheng