

September 11, 2023

To: Bellevue City Council
Fr: Craig Spiezle
Re: Oral Comments to Public Hearing
File# 232-586 Opposition to Transportation Benefit District (TBD) & Proposed Sales Tax Increase

Good evening my name is Craig Spiezle. I am speaking tonight on behalf of “Neighbors for a Livable Bellevue”, a large and growing coalition of Bellevue residents. We are our opposed to the formation of the Transportation Benefit District, (TBD) and to the proposed increase in sales tax. Contrary to what staff has stated, we need to have an honest and candid discussion. The only reason to approve a TBD is to impose a tax. This is the elephant in the room and the statements made regarding community engagement are inaccurate and overstate reality.

If approved, this will be the 4th tax Council approves in 10 months including a 2% increase in property taxes. These taxes are on top of the transportation tax levy approved in 2016. Further less than three years ago Council increased the sales tax to support affordable housing, also without voter approval.

The formation of the TBD is inappropriate. According to staff the proposed tax is estimated to generate over \$10 million annually, yet only 30% would fund transportation maintenance. The majority (70%), would fund “ongoing capital programs”, projects yet to be undefined. Creating a \$7 million year slush fund is not fiscally responsible.

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.

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. If budgets cannot be adjusted, funds should be re-allocated from city reserves. If reserves are not available, only 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 needs to focus on affordable living. It is a fact that sales taxes are regressive and will impact at-risk populations disproportionately.

While individually these tax increases may be 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 increase fiscal governance and discipline.

Thank you for your time and consideration and support of the City.