

MEMORANDUM



Bellevue Parks & Community Services

Date: July 12, 2022

To: Mayor Robinson and City Councilmembers

From: Bellevue Parks & Community Services Board

Subject: Proposed 2023-2029 Parks Capital Investment Program

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Parks & Community Services 2023-2029 Capital Investment Program (CIP) Plan. We hope that these comments are helpful as the Council prioritizes the City's capital investment needs for the next seven years.

As addressed in our communication to Council dated May 10, 2022, we support the ongoing efforts to advance the Parks future funding strategy for additional investments identified in the recently updated Parks and Open Space System Plan (Council Priority #9). Successful passage of this initiative will provide resources to expand and maintain our park systems to meet current demand and increase partnerships to leverage our resources.

At the March 8 and June 14 Board meetings, the Board reviewed the budget process and the proposed parks capital investments in relation to the City Council Vision Priorities (2021-2023). The Board noted that park investments directly advance many of the strategic target areas, including High Quality Built and Natural Environment; Bellevue: Great Places Where You Want to Be and Achieving Human Potential. We believe the recommended park capital projects below provide significant return on investment by advancing multiple Council Vision Priorities as well as addressing gaps identified in the Parks and Open Space System Plan (POSSP).

Overall, the Board considered a variety of factors in developing these recommendations, including projects that are geographically distributed, improve service level deficiencies identified in the POSSP, address emerging need, provide multiple benefits, have innovative funding, deliver levy commitments, and maintain existing infrastructure. The following recommendations below are given in no particular order:

- Continuing the commitment to the voters from the 2008 Parks and Natural Areas Levy, utilizing levy funds to develop the last two projects – Bellevue Airfield Park and Lake Sammamish Neighborhood Park.
- Maintaining existing capital infrastructure, including both the Parks Renovation and Enterprise Facility improvement programs, is critical to ensure facilities remain in good condition, safe, accessible, efficient and functional.
- With rapid growth and development, land has become more scarce, driving land values higher. Allocating more funding for Property Acquisition will increase our ability to aggressively pursue land purchases which improve park access to residents especially in the underserved communities of Eastgate, Factoria and BelRed. Funding would also support potential leverage opportunities to expand park facilities in the Wilburton area around the future Grand Connection (Council Priority #11).

- Continue to fully fund previously approved projects such as the Bridle Trails neighborhood park.
- Prioritize Ashwood Park planning, design and development to heighten the Council's vision of "City in a Park" by increasing access and balancing park amenities for all downtown neighborhoods.
- Continue the planning and site selection related to the Aquatics Center (Council Priority #13).
- Invest in Park trails development to address significant gaps in walkable access, connect parks and expand our trail system. Trail development protects our environment (Council Priority #8), encourages people to get fit, offers alternative transportation routes, and improves the health and well-being of residents, workers and visitors.
- Consider new investments for Emerging Sports and Off Leash Areas. The growing popularity of pickleball and cricket have highlighted the need to provide facilities for new growing user groups. Currently, the City's Off Leash facilities are deficient to address our community's demand, particularly in urban neighborhoods.

We support continued economic development in the City, but have concerns over adverse impacts to the Bellevue Park System and the ability to maintain our vision of a "City in a Park". We encourage the Council to balance growth in the Downtown and BelRed area with environmental conservation to ensure that we preserve, protect and enhance our precious natural environment for continued access, use and enjoyment of current and future generations. The recommended capital requests do not fully fund each project. The requested money represents modest investments to secure opportunities for acquisitions and leveraging of City funds for potential partnerships. For example, the the aquatics feasibility study will need creative funding solutions, including public-private partnerships, alternative funding sources, and operating subsidies to ensure public access. It's important that we continue to engage the community and plan for the public funding to ensure we are able to meet the public obligation and see the project through to completion.

Bellevue takes great pride in its parks and natural areas. We have seen that these investments contribute greatly to the quality of life in Bellevue, creating a special place in which families and business seek to locate and flourish. Research consistently shows that urban parks and recreation systems have positive economic impacts beyond a place to recreate and socialize with friends and family. Additionally, research shows that high quality, well-maintained parks contribute positively to the overall economic development of the City, including raising property values, attracting and retaining key businesses, promoting tourism, and protecting water and air quality. With a continuing stream of businesses locating their operations in Bellevue, it is critical that we build an even higher-quality system of parks and open spaces to enhance our desirability to employers and workers.

Once again, we appreciate the ability to provide comments on the 2023-2029 Parks CIP Plan, and look forward to continuing to engage as the budget process moves forward. Feel free to contact any of the Parks & Community Services Board members if you have questions or comments.