

## CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION ITEM

### SUBJECT

Status of the major Comprehensive Plan update project.

### STAFF CONTACT

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### POLICY FOUNDATION

The *Comprehensive Plan* establishes City policy direction for a wide range of actions and decisions. The state Growth Management Act requires the City to update the plan periodically. The next update is due for adoption by June 30, 2015.

### DIRECTION NEEDED FROM COUNCIL

<u>      </u>	Action
<u>  X  </u>	Discussion
<u>  X  </u>	Information

The City Council last received a major briefing on the Comprehensive Plan update at its September 15, 2015 meeting. Tonight's Study Session provides an update on staff and Commission progress since that time, as well as the detailed schedule for public review and Council consideration through to adoption.

The Council review schedule following completion of the Commission's work (summarized below) is intended to provide significant time for Council review and refinement of the recommendations later this spring.

### BACKGROUND

The Comprehensive Plan is the city-wide policy document that guides Bellevue's approach to growth and development, sets foundational policies for a wide array of City actions and decisions, and guides capital investments. The plan provides a long-term perspective, establishing a 20-year horizon for the desired future. It establishes policy direction on a range of issues, so that individual decisions can be made in light of a comprehensive, long-term, city-wide policy framework. Thus, Comprehensive Plan policies are frequently cited in the "Policy Considerations" section of Council agenda memos.

Every seven to ten years Bellevue is required to update its Comprehensive Plan to ensure continued compliance with the state Growth Management Act and, just as important, to ensure it reflects the dynamic changes and trends that affect the growth of the community. More than meeting a state requirement, Bellevue's Comprehensive Plan has been a fundamental part of the community's vision for the future since the beginning of the City. Bellevue approaches the plan update as an opportunity to ensure that policies continue to reflect local values and priorities, and

are relevant to the issues of the day. The last major review of the Comprehensive Plan was in 2004.

## **Project Overview**

At initiation of the project, the City Council provided direction on the update to ensure that it:

- Fully captures the community's vision
- Remains relevant to the community, decision makers and staff
- Comprehensively addresses long-term needs of the community, economy and environment
- Provides a strong policy foundation for City decisions and actions, especially related to infrastructure investments, neighborhoods, land use, environment and economic development
- Includes up to date information about the community
- Is consistent with state law, regional plans and court decisions.

Some of the components of the existing plan are relatively current and need minimal updates. Other components are significantly out of date. Council directed a work program to review each element of the plan and to make the whole plan more accessible and usable.

The September Study Session reiterated the project work program and reviewed major community changes that are influencing the update, such as anticipated growth, changes in the city's demographics, development activity, technological changes, and others. Since the September Study Session, progress has continued towards completing initial drafts of each section of the plan. This memo focuses on progress since September and the process for review of the full public review draft scheduled to be released later this month leading to a final Planning Commission recommendation and transmittal.

## **Recent Progress**

### **1. Draft Neighborhood Element**

At the September 15 Study Session, Councilmembers asked whether the Comprehensive Plan should include a Neighborhoods Element. While Council did not provide conclusive direction, the question raised interest in how best to recognize the importance of vibrant neighborhoods as a defining feature for Bellevue. Among other neighborhood issues, Councilmembers expressed interest in making sure that the update addresses the protection of neighborhoods and their character even as the City evolves.

Staff responded to this Council interest by considering different approaches to addressing those interests. That analysis led staff to conclude that while other elements of the plan address many issues that are important to neighborhoods, gaps exist that could be filled in by new element specific to neighborhoods. Staff drafted a new Neighborhoods Element and sought the Planning Commission's initial review. See Attachment 1. The Neighborhood Element fills gaps, expresses how neighborhood (subarea) plans relate to the overall Comprehensive Plan, and provides a cross-referencing section to identify key neighborhood policies found throughout the plan. Overall, the new Neighborhood Element will reinforce the importance of quality neighborhoods, and will provide a single place where one looking for neighborhood policies may begin.

While the Planning Commission has only had a limited opportunity to review and discuss the new draft, their initial response has been quite positive.

## **2. Comprehensive Plan Vision**

In recent months the Planning Commission has worked on a significant update of the Comprehensive Plan Vision, first through a subcommittee and then through the full Commission. While this is still a work in progress, the current draft is provided in Attachment 2.

The Vision is a foundational part of the Comprehensive Plan, and re-visiting the Vision is a critical step in the overall plan update process. The Vision ensures that the entire document works together toward a common and integrated set of outcomes, and provides guidance to the City organization in aligning toward a desired long-term future for the community.

The Vision should be aspirational—not a statement of what already is, but what could be. It should represent a dynamic tension that challenges the community and the organization to reach toward a better future and beyond today's achievements. The Vision should also be based on community values, and it should be inclusive of the entire community.

Last year the City Council conducted a visioning exercise and developed a new Council Vision to guide City actions. The plan update seeks to ensure that the Comprehensive Plan Vision and the Council Vision are well aligned. It also seeks to strengthen the linkage between the plan Vision and the individual elements of the Comprehensive Plan. To draw these linkages very directly, the new draft Vision is in large part a compilation of the vision statements for each of the twelve elements of the Comprehensive Plan. Collectively, these present a set of future aspirations that work together as a whole and feed directly into each of the elements.

## **3. Continued Progress on Other Elements**

Since September, the Commission and staff have continued work on these elements, and have made some significant refinements. Attachment 3 provides a summary of the reviews that have occurred on individual items since September, in addition to the above-noted work on the Neighborhoods Element and the Vision.

### **Public Release Draft**

The Planning Commission is just completing its review of individual policy sections of the plan. The current schedule is to assemble the components that have been reviewed individually into a complete draft plan for public review for release on February 11. With the public release draft, the city will conduct a new round of public outreach. A combination of a traditional open house and an on-line open house will give people the opportunity to see how the plan has changed and comment on specific aspects of the plan. An *It's Your City* article, articles in the *Bellevue Reporter*, and social media messages will guide people to the City's website where they can view the draft and find out about events. A joint meeting of the boards and commissions will allow board and commission members to review the plan together and discuss how the plan works as an integrated document. There will also be presentations to the Network on Aging, the Youth Link Board and other groups. A public hearing with the Planning Commission is scheduled for March 4 to formally collect comments on the draft.

## **Next Steps**

As noted above, a complete draft update of the Comprehensive Plan is scheduled for public release on February 11. This will set off a period of review by the public, boards and commissions culminating with the March 4 public hearing held by the Planning Commission. The recommendation on the draft is anticipated to be submitted to Council on April 6. Currently, Council is scheduled to hold a number of Study Sessions to review the draft in detail, prior to the June 30 state deadline for adoption.

February 11 – Release of a draft Comprehensive Plan update for public review  
February 25 – Open house and joint meeting of the boards and commissions  
February/March – Review by boards and commissions  
March 4 – Public hearing before the Planning Commission  
April 6 – Transmittal to Council  
April 6, 13, 27, May 11 – Council Study Sessions (tentative dates for multiple review sessions)  
June 15 – Potential Council action

## **ATTACHMENTS**

1. Draft Neighborhood Element
2. Draft Community Vision
3. Recent Progress on Other Elements
4. Crossroads/Bel-Red Boundary Map
5. South Downtown Boundary Map
6. Draft Urban Design Street Maps