



Bellevue Planning Commission

July 7, 2021

PLANNING COMMISSION STUDY SESSION ITEM

SUBJECT

Final Review on the Neighborhood Area Plan for Northwest Bellevue: Study Session #3

STAFF CONTACTS

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POLICY ISSUES

Neighborhood Area Plans bring the City's broader vision to life in a local way. The policies found within these plans provide guidance to City staff and consultants, those working on projects in the community, and others helping to shape our neighborhoods' futures. These broad plans provide a framework for future work in the neighborhoods.

DIRECTION NEEDED FROM THE PLANNING COMMISSION

ACTION

DIRECTION

INFORMATION ONLY

This plan is part of the annual Comprehensive Plan Amendment (CPA) process. Tonight's focus is a continued discussion of the specific policies found within the plan. Staff is not seeking direction today on this plan due to the upcoming public hearing scheduled for July 14th. The material included in that public hearing notice and [staff report](#) were sent to the Commission on June 29. Tonight's special meeting has been scheduled to allow the Commission additional time to discuss the policies with the staff report in hand.

BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS

The Community Development Department is leading this effort, and the first two new Neighborhood Area Plans under development are for Northwest Bellevue and Northeast Bellevue. The goal is to update all Neighborhood Area Plans over the coming years, focusing on two at a time to provide focused outreach and community engagement opportunities.

Previous Planning Commission Review

When the Planning Commission last reviewed these plans on June 9, there was interest in specifically pulling out those policies that do not seem to have community agreement. Staff have pulled these policies out for further discussion in this memo and hopes to provide a better background on these topics and how those policies came about. It is important to note that planning policies rarely have 100% community support, as there is always a range of community opinion on long-range topics such as those found in a comprehensive plan. It is important to understand this range of opinion and define policies that best serve the particular community while taking into consideration the City's overall vision, priorities, and regional commitments. The following section aims to provide that range of opinion and explain how the proposed policies address the community's needs.

The draft plan is attached as Attachment A. A few minor changes have taken place since the June 9 study session, including some typographical edits, addition of the map to page 1, and some stylistic edits to clarify present versus future discussion in the narrative. There were also several changes to the policies that were referenced in the June 9 memo and presentation as planned changes due to community feedback.

Policies to Highlight

Because the full draft plan was reviewed with the Commission over the last two study sessions, this section highlights only those policies that have garnered significant further discussion either from the public or the Commission in recent months. These policies have been highlighted in yellow in Attachment A to bring particular attention to them. The remaining policies seem to have general agreement so have been left out of this more detailed discussion. As discussed in the previous sessions, the draft plan is divided into the following 5 sections based on broad topics brought up by residents during early community outreach.

Sense of Place

This section focuses on what is unique about the physical attributes of Northwest Bellevue. There has been general positive response to the goals and policies maintaining the sub-neighborhoods, improving the experiential qualities, and transitioning between Northwest Bellevue and its neighboring jurisdictions, such as Kirkland, Medina, and Clyde Hill.

There have been public comments calling for further division of Northwest Bellevue to address the variety of areas found within its borders. A few residents have called for splitting the plan into separate plans for each of the many sub-neighborhoods, such as Meydenbauer Bay, Vuecrest, Spring Hills, and Apple Valley. Policies are able to address unique needs for these areas, but very few specifics have been brought forward by these or other residents. The only specifics have been requests that single-family neighborhoods with a predominant style (such as single-story ramblers) be codified to remain that way in scale, style, setback, etc. New codes such as these are outside the scope of the Comprehensive plan. It would also require separate codes for many areas within Northwest Bellevue alone, an exercise that would be unrealistic and overly restrictive for many homeowners. The plan has instead focused on providing policies encouraging the continuation of the variety of housing type, scale, and character that exists today, such as the following. There has been general support for these policies.

S-NW-3: Preserve the existing sub-neighborhood characters by encouraging rehabilitation and maintenance of the existing housing stock.

S-NW-4: Integrate new development into its surrounding sub-neighborhood by orienting it in a similar fashion to existing development and transitioning in scale to adjacent land uses

There is also a goal in this section focusing on maintaining “a clear separation between Downtown Bellevue and Northwest Bellevue.” There has been general agreement with this goal and its associated policies. One policy in particular has tried to focus on the areas of Northwest Bellevue that border

Downtown Bellevue. This policy has not received significant comment from the public but acts as an example of a policy that discusses a subset of areas within Northwest Bellevue.

S-NW-9: Create a separation between the low-intensity uses within Northwest Bellevue and Downtown Bellevue, utilizing buffers such as McCormick Park and/or gradients of building scale within Northwest Bellevue to ease that transition where appropriate.

Sense of Community

While there have been some members of the community who have felt that this section is unnecessary or outside the scope of what the City should focus on, the majority of residents have expressed excitement around and support for these policies. A desire for a greater sense of community and connection was a theme heard throughout the engagement in surveys and at virtual events. Public comments have not highlighted any specific concerns regarding these policies.

Housing Affordability

This section includes only one goal and its three policies. Those have been repeated here for reference purposes.

To create a diverse supply of housing typologies through the use of existing single- and multi-family densities and the encouragement of housing between these two scales.

S-NW-24: Encourage a mix of housing typologies, within both lower and higher intensity districts, to allow for a range of affordability options, size of housing units, ease of movement for the physically disabled, and visual styles.

S-NW-25: Explore introducing detached accessory dwelling units as a permitted use within single-family areas.

S-NW-26: Explore regulations to minimize the impact from any new accessory dwelling units to the existing residential character of the street.

This goal and its associated policies have been the primary topic of public and Commission discussion in the first two study sessions on this plan. Housing affordability was the number one challenge brought up when analyzing all comments received across all platforms of communication throughout the last year of outreach efforts. There have been many nuances to those comments and what solutions residents would like to consider, but there is broad consensus that the affordability of housing is of great concern to Northwest Bellevue.

A solution that was consistently brought up across multiple platforms by many different residents was to broaden the options available, both in type and size or related cost. Because Northwest Bellevue already has some variety, this means both protecting that variety and adding to it. S-NW-24 addresses this approach. Very few public comments have focused on this policy. Policy S-NW-25 goes hand-in-hand with the previous policy, applying the overarching need for more housing options to the single-family areas as well. This is the policy that has produced the most discussion. Throughout engagement events, any discussion of housing affordability ended up with one or more residents suggesting the introduction of detached accessory dwelling units (DADUs). Generally, more residents who attended

events agreed with this approach than disagreed, so an early draft of the policies included much stronger wording that called for permitting DADUs within Northwest Bellevue.

Since this was an important topic, staff sent out a questionnaire to every household in Northwest Bellevue that, among other issues, posed a question about DADUs. It asked how much residents agreed or disagreed (and how strongly) with the statement that “backyard cottages would provide an important smaller and more affordable housing option in Northwest Bellevue.” Some residents have expressed concerns or misunderstandings about this question type. Likert scale questions are a widely used format for measuring opinions and attitudes. Rather than asking for a simple yes or no answer, Likert questions use a five point scale to capture more nuanced answers. Likert scale questions are based around a clear statements, then ask for the respondent to state the level of agreement or disagreement. This question type does not presuppose that respondents will answer a specific way but looks to understand the range of opinions. Those that oppose the introduction of DADUs certainly selected the disagree options and often also added additional commentary to support that view. Ultimately, over 250 Northwest Bellevue residents responded, with 45% of residents either somewhat or strongly agreeing with the statement and 44% of residents either somewhat or strongly disagreeing. The mean answer was 3.07, where 1 is strongly agree, 3 is neutral, and 5 is strongly disagree.

A subsequent housing options event spurred deeper conversation with a more informed lens, and staff found that this discussion again included general interest in DADUs. Those that opposed DADUs were mostly focused on the specific code regulations, such as owner occupancy and off-street parking, that they wanted to see on the table before considering supporting their addition to Northwest Bellevue. Because of this concern and the questionnaire figures, staff adjusted the previous policy to the new S-NW-25, which calls for further exploration of these options. This policy responded to community feedback and no longer calls for the introduction of DADUs. It instead focuses on a much-needed broader conversation on the topic, apparent through the great variety of opinions found within both Northwest Bellevue and Northeast Bellevue.

As discussed at the June 9 study session, a larger discussion that brings the upcoming housing needs assessment, growth targets, and other Citywide needs into focus will be needed. In addition, this conversation is very closely tied to code regulations, which are beyond the scope of the Comprehensive Plan. The questionnaire also asked about agreement that “backyard cottages would need to be regulated around things like size, placement, parking, and tree removal.” This statement got overwhelming agreement from the community, with a mean of 1.3 where 1 is strongly agree and 5 is strongly disagree. These larger topics and the associated potential code regulations require a broader effort across the entire City. This will relate well to the upcoming work on the Periodic Update to the Comprehensive Plan, which will begin community outreach in six months, at the start of 2022.

Mobility and Access

This section includes goals and policies related to a variety of modes of transportation. There has been general agreement with these goals and policies. There have been two topics that have had continued conversation from the public. The first relates to vehicular speeds in residential areas.

Policy S-NW-31: Utilize traffic calming measures to discourage people from driving faster than the speed limit within residential neighborhoods.

This policy came about because of a number of concerns regarding cut-through traffic. Some community members were interested in seeing a policy that forbade drivers from cutting through residential areas

when their destination is outside those areas, while others wanted to permit this activity for those that live in the area. Staff ultimately found in discussions that the concern was about the speed of this cut-through traffic and the safety impact on pedestrians, so this policy was created to address that concern. Since its drafting, staff have not received significant comment regarding this topic and believe that this policy adequately addresses the concerns initially raised by residents.

The second topic of continued conversation relates to completing sidewalks. Northwest Bellevue has a number of areas with sidewalks that start and stop, so a policy was created to focus on this issue in addition to a similar issue expressed by cyclists.

Policy S-NW-33: Prioritize completing gaps in pedestrian and bicycle networks to provide continuity within the network.

There has been moderate continued discussion/commentary on the need to complete sidewalk gaps. The process for determining specific areas to use limited City funds for this issue is defined by the Transportation department and follows the [Pedestrian-Bicycle Plan](#). The Comprehensive Plan is a long-range planning document, focusing on broad policies meant to guide planning efforts for decades to come. It does not include detailed action items or implementation strategies and provides the policy direction for implementation. The comments related to more detailed implementation efforts have been passed along to the appropriate department and included in the previously-discussed [Neighborhood Proposals list](#).

Environment

The goals and policies stated within this section have broad general support from the community. Public comment has emphasized the importance of tree preservation and called for immediate action to strengthen our various codes that relate to tree retention. A number of policies address tree planting and preservation, but one in particular addresses this topic as it relates to neighborhood-specific efforts:

Policy S-NW-43: Support efforts to both protect Northwest Bellevue's tree canopy and enhance the health of trees on both public and private property.

The specific requests for changes to the City Code must be addressed as part of a Citywide effort that is already called out for in the recently adopted Environmental Stewardship Plan. Rather than implementing individual code changes that impact separate neighborhoods, a larger effort is planned as an upcoming workplan element.

Next Steps

Tonight's study session is the third scheduled for reviewing the draft plans themselves following an introductory study session that was held on April 28. A public hearing is required and has been scheduled for July 14. This timing would allow for an additional study session, if desired by the Commission, in late July to be utilized for further discussion of the draft plan and public comments resulting from the public hearing. This would allow for further discussion to occur prior to the August break in Commission meetings. In order to move this plan forward as part of the annual CPA process, City Council would need to review it in the Fall and adopt it before the end of the year.

ATTACHMENTS

A. Northwest Bellevue Draft Plan with Highlights