

MEMORANDUM



Bellevue Parks &
Community Services

Date: May 10, 2022

REVIEW DRAFT

To: Mayor Robinson, Deputy Mayor Nieuwenhuis, and Bellevue City Council members

From: David Hamilton, Chair
Parks & Community Services Board

RE: Parks long-term funding strategy

The Parks & Community Services Board appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback on areas of focus for additional investment in Bellevue's parks and open space system. The timing of these discussions is ideal as the board has studied and discussed future capital project objectives based on extensive public outreach conducted for the 2022 Parks & Open Space System Plan. At our April and May meetings, the board identified both higher level principles for a future funding strategy, as well as a series of recommendations related to focus areas within the Parks & Open Space System Plan.

In terms of overall principles, the Board recommends the parks funding strategy:

- Include a mix of projects, some that can be implemented and delivered quickly along with others that are phased investments in larger long-term project objectives.
- Seek to move the needle on Bellevue's goal of bringing a park or trail within walking distance to each and every Bellevue resident by investing in acquisition and park development in neighborhoods that are currently not served or are underserved.
- Address the impacts of growth by providing open spaces where growth occurs
- Provide significant funding early in the process to allow the city to maximize leveraged partnerships, opportunistic property acquisitions and development windows.
- Advance the adopted Council Vision and Priorities

For the **Trails and Open Space** focus area, the board recommends:

- Continued expansion of the city's park trail system
- Acquisition and preservation of undeveloped open space

Bellevue's extensive trail system is one of the most used features of our parks and open space system. Bellevue residents regularly voice support for placing trail development and open space preservation at the top of the priority list. Undeveloped open space is exceedingly scarce and high land values encourage development within fragile and ecologically rich landscapes and habitats.

For the **Park Facilities** focus area, the board recommends:

- New neighborhood park acquisition and development
- Continued acquisition to expand existing community parks

Some Bellevue neighborhoods are better served by parks and trails than others. The Parks & Open Space System Plan and Environmental Stewardship Initiative share a goal to increase walkable access to parks and trails. This can be accomplished by acquiring and developing neighborhood parks in identified underserved areas such as Eastgate and Factoria, among others. It can also be accomplished by creating parks and park amenities on existing city-owned land and expanding existing community parks as adjacent land becomes available.

For the **Active Recreation** focus area, the board recommends:

- Funding to support continued progress toward a new Aquatic Center
- Improvements within existing parks to increase public use and programming

The City's funding strategy should include investment in new park features that are responsive to contemporary community needs, including, but not limited to off-leash dog areas, pickleball courts and cricket grounds. It should also invest in larger long-term goals that meet community recreation needs, such as investing in the Council Priority for a new public aquatic facility.

For the **Urban Park Systems** focus area, the board recommends:

- Continued investment in parks serving Downtown Bellevue
- Enhanced investment to create new parks serving BelRed
- New investment in parks and trails serving the Wilburton commercial area

Bellevue's future growth is focused in high-density urban areas. These areas hold unique challenges for developing parks and open space yet are critical to retaining the city's character as a City in a Park. Investment is necessary in existing urban parks such as the next phases of Meydenbauer Bay Park and Ashwood Playfield. Additionally, investment is needed immediately in developing urban areas like BelRed and Wilburton in hopes of preserving land suitable for parks and recreation before such opportunities are lost.

For the **Water Access** focus area, the board recommends:

- Continued phased investment in Meydenbauer Bay Park
- Funding for Bellevue's first waterfront park on Lake Sammamish

In the outreach for this and previous Parks & Open Space System Plans, the Bellevue community consistently supports increased public access to the city's shorelines. This can be advanced by focusing investments on each end of Bellevue's Lake to Lake Trail System. Continued investments in the Council-adopted master plan for Meydenbauer Bay Park advances Council Priorities including the Grand Connection. Developing the city's first waterfront park on Lake Sammamish will achieve the long-held community goal of linking parks and trails to connect one lake to the other across the city.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide feedback and insight on the exciting prospect of additional needed investment in Bellevue's parks and open space system. The Parks & Community Services Board is here to help in any way it can. If you have any questions about the board's work, please contact me at dhamilton@bellevuewa.gov.