

CITY COUNCIL AGENDA TOPIC

Great Neighborhoods Program – Initiation of Lake Hills and West Lake Sammamish Neighborhood Area Plans

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**DIRECTION**

Provide direction to initiate Comprehensive Plan Amendments to update the Lake Hills and West Lake Sammamish neighborhood area plans in 2027 as part of the city's Great Neighborhoods program, consistent with Bellevue Land Use Section 20.30I.130.B.3.

RECOMMENDATION

Direct staff to initiate Comprehensive Plan Amendments to update the Lake Hills and West Lake Sammamish neighborhood area plans as part of the 2027 Comprehensive Plan annual amendments, confirm the recommendation to update plans in Woodridge and West Bellevue in 2027/2028, and provide direction for neighborhood area plan updates for Bridle Trails in 2028/2029.

BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS**Background**

Bellevue is a community of diverse and vibrant neighborhoods. Bellevue has 16 neighborhood areas that cover the full extent of the city. Each neighborhood area contains several distinct sub-neighborhoods within it. Strong community connections directly raise the quality of life and strengthen neighborhoods. The City Council affirmed this with the city's initiation of the Great Neighborhoods program in 2018. The objectives of the program are:

1. To develop neighborhood area plans that reflect current citywide and neighborhood priorities and address issues and opportunities that are relevant to the local community.
2. To conduct a planning process that is based on a collaborative partnership between the city and neighborhoods; to expand community capacity for neighborhood leadership that will carry forward beyond this planning process.

The first round of council-initiated neighborhood area plan updates began in August 2018 and included Northeast Bellevue and Northwest Bellevue. The Great Neighborhoods program paused during the large-scale Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update from 2021-2024. The program resumed in September 2024 with the Crossroads and Newport neighborhood area plans. Council will receive Planning Commission recommendations for proposed updates to the Eastgate and Factoria neighborhood area plans this fall.

Lessons Learned

Staff is committed to continuous process improvement across each iteration of the Great Neighborhoods program, refining our workplan and engagement approach year to year. At the direction of council, the team expanded outreach to youth, the business community and affordable housing and service providers during the planning process for Eastgate and Factoria. These engagement activities yielded valuable insights that directly informed plan policies, helped ensure the work was truly representative of the diverse perspectives and needs in these neighborhoods, and cultivated lasting relationships with community partners that can be leveraged for other city initiatives. The team also worked with the Eastgate Community Association to pilot a community-led urban design activity that was well-received and can serve as a replicable model for future iterations.

Neighborhood Area Plans and the Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update

Council adopted the Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update on October 22, 2024. Bellevue's Comprehensive Plan is organized into two volumes. The citywide policies in Volume 1 are divided into different elements such as land use, housing, transportation, capital facilities and parks. Volume 2 contains goals and policies for each of the 16 neighborhood areas. The Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update amended Volume 1 and the Land Use Map of the existing Comprehensive Plan and included limited amendments to the neighborhood area (subarea) plans in Volume 2 to align with state law and citywide policies in Volume 1.

The Great Neighborhoods program is meant to comprehensively update neighborhood area plans through equitable engagement and by defining specific values and policies to supplement or implement citywide policies contained within Volume 1. The Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update's Neighborhoods element (NH) and Land Use (LU) element provide policies that guide updates to neighborhood area (subarea) plans.

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| Policy NH-17. | Use the neighborhood area planning process to implement citywide policies adopted within the comprehensive plan. |
| Policy NH-18. | Periodically update neighborhood area plans consistent with the planning boundaries shown in Map NH-1. For any given site, the 2014 subarea plan policies remain in effect until and unless they have been superseded by new planning area boundaries and policies. |
| Policy NH-19. | Use the neighborhood area planning process to equitably engage local communities to define neighborhood area specific values and policies. |
| Policy LU-23. | Plan for Countywide Centers as part of the Neighborhood Area Planning process, including an assessment of housing need and tools to provide affordable housing, an assessment of historic and cultural assets, an assessment of the risks for displacement of residents and businesses, and support for local access that promotes active transportation. |

See Attachment A for the abovementioned Map NH-1 – Neighborhood Area Boundaries.

Objectives and Scope

The Great Neighborhoods program provides a strategic, community-driven process for developing neighborhood area plans. A neighborhood area plan articulates a vision consistent with the citywide vision, sets priorities and identifies future actions to realize the community's vision at the neighborhood level.

Neighborhood plans occur within the framework of the City's values, vision and adopted policies and regulations. Neighborhood plans will not propose direction that conflicts with citywide policy guidance or expressed priorities, propose direction that will result in a citywide impact or limit the ability of private property owners to exercise reasonable use of their property. For example, a neighborhood plan could not change the citywide growth strategy articulated in Volume 1 of the Comprehensive Plan.

The objective of the program is to adopt plans for each neighborhood area that are relevant to the community's distinctive identity, adaptability, social connectivity and core needs with a high level of community ownership of the plan. The neighborhood area planning process is rooted in extensive community engagement and seeks to equitably engage local communities to define specific neighborhood values and priorities that can be reflected through policies. Particular attention is given to historically underserved communities and identifying any missing voices and perspectives to have representative engagement.

The scope centers around strengthening a neighborhood area's unique identity and community gathering places as Bellevue prepares and plans for its well-managed future growth including:

- Comprehensive Subarea Plan Update: Conduct a full update of the existing subarea plans and policies to be consistent with the neighborhood area boundaries for Lake Hills and West Lake Sammamish and implement citywide policies adopted within the Comprehensive Plan.
- Land Use: Set direction of a neighborhood area's future growth through updates to the Future Land Use Map. The City may initiate map amendments based on changed conditions in these neighborhood areas. Property owners may initiate site-specific map changes that would be considered as part of this process if those sites could function as third places and meet established criteria. See Attachment B for additional details on the process and criteria for site-specific map amendments.
- Urban Design: Establish design strategies to improve the design and function of public spaces throughout the neighborhood based on what the community identifies as opportunities and challenges for accessing these spaces today. Concept maps are included in the neighborhood area plan to help visualize policy direction for existing and potential new public spaces.

Subsections of the plan include:

- Neighborhood Identity: Develop policies to identify and strengthen a neighborhood's unique elements in the built and natural environment, e.g., thresholds, cultural assets, natural features, as it continues to evolve and grow.
- Mixed Use Centers and Neighborhood Centers: Develop policies that strengthen Mixed Use Centers and Neighborhood Centers as places that provide goods, services, cultural amenities, and housing opportunities for the community. Lake Hills includes small portions of the

Crossroads and Eastgate Mixed Use Centers, which are Candidate Countywide Centers. As directed by King County Countywide Planning Policies (CPPs), plans covering a Countywide Center must meet transit-supportive densities for jobs and residents, as well as support tools to provide affordable housing, assess historic and cultural assets, address risk for displacement of residents and businesses, and support transit access and active transportation.

- Community Gathering Spaces: Develop policies around strengthening and creating spaces that serve as the heart of the neighborhood for community events and social interactions. Policies can support how the City works internally and with community partners to develop, enhance, and better connect people to these spaces.
- Mobility and Access: Develop policies around improved access to mobility options, convenient connections throughout the neighborhood and beyond, and improvements that can inform future capital improvements around streets, sidewalks, bicycle facilities, and trails. Planning in Lake Hills will recognize the existing King County Metro RapidRide B Line and anticipate future high-capacity transit in preparation for the planning and designing of Metro's RapidRide K Line between Kirkland and Bellevue. While planning directly related to bus service and station area planning is not immediately within the scope and timing of neighborhood area plan updates, the planning process can support policy direction toward collaboration with King County Metro and anticipation of future station area planning.
- Environment: Develop policies around improving the aesthetic and functional qualities of natural features within the neighborhood, such as streams, wetlands, and other natural areas, to support community resilience, human connection to nature, and habitat health.

All neighborhood area plans will follow a consistent organizational structure similar to recent neighborhood area plan updates. A uniform structure for neighborhood area plans will make it easier for readers to use the document and reinforce awareness that each plan is part of the larger Comprehensive Plan. Neighborhood area plans will include a vision centered around a neighborhood's core values, background and community context, concept maps that visualize urban design strategies for improving public spaces, and goals and policies that are unique to that neighborhood area.

Work Program

The work program is organized into four phases of activity, following project initiation and relationship building, as outlined below and depicted graphically in Attachment C. This process follows the same format as updates to neighborhood area plans in 2025 and 2026. It will allow participants to share information about what is unique and distinctive in their neighborhood area, identify priorities and consider strategic options in a logical and transparent manner.

Discover: Engage with the community to understand issues, identify values and priorities, and learn about qualities that make the neighborhood unique. *Timeline: August – December 2026*

Define: Develop and affirm the neighborhood vision, design principles, and key priorities that are building blocks for the draft plan. *Timeline: January – April 2027*

Refine: Review draft plans with the community, boards, and commissions, incorporate feedback, and address any missing elements. *Timeline: May 2027 – August 2027*

Adopt: The final draft plans, including any environmental analysis as required per SEPA (State Environmental Policy Act), are reviewed and recommended by the Planning Commission and then reviewed and adopted by council as an element of the city's Comprehensive Plan. *Timeline: September – December 2027*

The Great Neighborhoods program entails the preparation of two neighborhood area plans per cycle, targeting the end of the next calendar year for council review and adoption to align with the annual Comprehensive Plan amendment process. The planning process is designed to take just over one year to complete and, therefore, two iterations will overlap during the fall. Relevant boards and commissions will be engaged around specific policy areas where they have expertise. Their recommendations will be incorporated into the overall neighborhood area plans for the Planning Commission. The Planning Commission is the body that will have the most involvement in the neighborhood area planning process. The Planning Commission will provide a recommendation for council consideration on the neighborhood area plans for Lake Hills and West Lake Sammamish in fall 2027.

Upcoming Plans

At the initiation of the Eastgate and Factoria neighborhood area plan updates on August 4, 2025, council directed that the city proceed with the Woodridge and West Bellevue neighborhood area plans in 2027/2028. For the 2028/2029 iteration of the Great Neighborhoods program, staff recommend the city proceed with the Bridle Trails neighborhood area plan. The sequence of the remaining neighborhood areas will continue to be assessed as other planning considerations emerge out of other citywide initiatives and statewide legislation.

To determine the sequence of preparing future neighborhood areas plans, neighborhood areas were evaluated based on planning impetuses such as the Countywide Center and Regional Growth Center designation process, development of Neighborhood Centers, equity needs, and other ongoing and planned city initiatives. Due to new state planning requirements and anticipated departmental work program demands, staff, community, and organizational capacity will be limited. As a result, staff recommend updating only one neighborhood plan during the 2028/2029 planning cycle.

Community Engagement Strategy

The goal of the community engagement plan is to manage equitable and informed dialogue about the community's vision at the neighborhood level. As shown in the table below, the phases follow the overall schedule and include relationship building efforts prior to launching the neighborhood area planning process in Lake Hills and West Lake Sammamish. A detailed community engagement plan summary is included as Attachment D.

Time	Phase	Focus	Engagement Goals	Engagement Tools & Activities
May – July 2026	0	Relationship Building	▪ Connect with key individuals, community partners, and neighborhood groups. ▪ Gain a broad understanding of neighborhood concerns and opportunities. ▪ Establish opportunities for collaboration on communication and events. ▪ Build list of contacts who want to engage once the project launches.	▪ One-on-one meetings ▪ Tabling at community events
Aug – Dec 2026	1	Discover	▪ Build awareness of Neighborhood Area Planning process, including plan development and privately initiated land use map changes. ▪ Build list of people and organizations who wish to participate in process. ▪ Engage with boards & commissions for their expertise on neighborhood issues to inform engagement opportunities. ▪ Set expectations and clarify timeline for community members. ▪ Evaluate public space opportunities and challenges through a public space assessment. ▪ Understand the community's core values to guide the neighborhood plan. ▪ Identify community features and assets that define neighborhood identity.	▪ Mailed and online questionnaire ▪ Kick-off event ▪ Presentations to neighborhood groups ▪ Presentations to boards & commissions ▪ Tabling at community events ▪ Public Space Assessment
Jan – Apr 2027	2	Define	▪ Share initial draft of neighborhood vision for review. ▪ Share key policy priorities for review. ▪ Work with community to identify urban design principles and opportunities for enhancing public spaces.	▪ Informational session ▪ Public space workshops ▪ Community partner events
May – Aug 2027	3	Refine	▪ Share full draft plan for community review. ▪ Ensure community members know how their input shaped the draft plan. ▪ Incorporate additional community prior to review by the Planning Commission.	▪ Informational open house ▪ Presentations to boards & commissions ▪ Planning Commission Study Sessions
Sep – Dec 2027	4	Adopt	▪ Ensure community members understand the legislative process and know how to share comments with the Planning Commission and City Council.	▪ Review and recommendation by Planning Commission ▪ Review and adoption by City Council

POLICY & FISCAL IMPACTS

Policy Impact

This planning initiative will result in Comprehensive Plan Amendments for the Lake Hills and West Lake Sammamish neighborhood area plans, setting goals and policies to realize the community's vision at the neighborhood level.

Fiscal Impact

Fiscal impacts of the neighborhood area plan updates are unknown at this time. The Comprehensive Plan and associated neighborhood area plans are the city's guiding policy documents, with functional plans developed or updated as future steps which could lead to new housing and economic development opportunities with related capital investments in parks, open space and transportation facilities, and increases in public services. Any funding requests that result from the plan updates will be brought to council at a later date, either via the budget process or other action if needed.

OPTIONS

1. Direct staff to initiate work on the Comprehensive Plan Amendments to update the Lake Hills and West Lake Sammamish neighborhood area plans in 2026/2027 and provide direction on the recommendation for Bridle Trails neighborhood area planning to occur in 2028/2029, consistent with Bellevue Land Use Code Section 20.30I.130.B.3.
2. Do not direct staff to initiate work on the Comprehensive Plan Amendments to update the Lake Hills and West Lake Sammamish neighborhood area plans in 2026/2027 and provide an alternative recommendation to staff.

ATTACHMENTS

- A. Neighborhood Area Boundaries
- B. Process Outline and Criteria for Future Land Use Map Changes
- C. Project Timeline
- D. Community Engagement Plan Summary

AVAILABLE IN COUNCIL LIBRARY

N/A