

CITY COUNCIL AGENDA TOPIC

Update on City Partnership with the Bellevue Downtown Association (BDA)

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Community Development

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**INFORMATION
ONLY**

Patrick Bannon, BDA President, will provide an update on its partnership with Cultural and Economic Development to support public space management and activation downtown.

Prior programs have included installation of lanterns, tables, chairs, and umbrellas along the Grand Connection, pilot wayfinding signage, and expanded marketing of local businesses through the “Heart of Bellevue” program. Active public space management of this kind supports small businesses, spurs investment, and can provide new cultural opportunities for residents, workers, and visitors. They also align with the Grand Connection vision for a set of interconnected pedestrian experiences from Meydenbauer Bay Park to Eastrail.

RECOMMENDATION

N/A

BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS**Background and Vision**

The City is experiencing significant growth in the downtown core and in nearby neighborhoods (like Wilburton and BelRed) as Bellevue residents increasingly choose to live and work in well-connected neighborhoods and places with cultural attractions and multimodal transportation options. In addition, as office workers continue to return to downtown and more residents move to the growing number of residential towers, Bellevue has seen increased demand for daily outdoor programming like food trucks, live music, and additional seating. Finally, in the very near future, East Link will create even more transit opportunities for the Downtown, Wilburton, and BelRed neighborhoods.

The city’s Grand Connection program—a set of interconnected pedestrian experiences from Meydenbauer Bay Park through downtown, across I-405 to the Eastrail corridor in Wilburton—is meant to meet this transformative moment. The vision for a series of activated and managed public spaces across the entire corridor will require strong partnership with private- and nonprofit-sector stakeholders, property owners, and ground-level retailers. Ultimately, the City needs partnerships with organizations like the BDA and the Friends of the Grand Connection to support this work.

Current Partnership

For the past several years, in support of the Grand Connection vision, the city's Cultural and Economic Development team has partnered with the Bellevue Downtown Association (BDA) to support public space management and activation downtown. The partnership has taken multiple forms:

- In **2019**, the teams launched the partnership with a distinctive yellow lantern installation along the Grand Connection corridor, proving the community demand for enhanced public spaces.
- In **2020**, the BDA pivoted and developed a COVID-19 recovery marketing campaign called Heart of Bellevue which supported local businesses, boosted economic activity, and supported outdoor dining on Main Street through its AI Fresco campaign.
- In **2021**, the partnership added outdoor furniture, including tables and chairs, and continued the successful Heart of Bellevue and AI Fresco campaigns.
- In **2022-23**, to mark the return of regular daily foot traffic as remote workers began to return to the office, the BDA added weather protection to its tables and chairs, continued its lantern program, piloted an "ambassador" program with student interns, and deployed its wayfinding signage.

Active public space management has many benefits. Most importantly, spaces which are programmed and active on a regular basis benefit nearby businesses and support the local economy, increasing municipal tax revenue that supports City services. They can spur additional investment in property redevelopment, provide new cultural opportunities, and attract tourism. Public spaces which are well stewarded by private and nonprofit partners can also improve public health and increase the sense of safety and security. Finally, well-programmed spaces enhance the sense of civic identity, which improves quality of life for residents, workers, and visitors alike.

Tonight, the BDA will provide a report on their 2022-23 public space management projects, as well as an overview of how this work aligns with its strategic plan.

POLICY & FISCAL IMPACTS

Policy Impact

Existing policies support and enable robust work on place management throughout Bellevue.

For example, recommendations and strategies found within various City policy documents, including the *Economic Development Plan*, the *Comprehensive Plan*, the *Downtown Livability Initiative*, the *Grand Connection Framework Plan*, and various planning efforts focus on the visitor experience, the creative economy, and the development of the city. For example:

The "Economic Development" element of the *Comprehensive Plan* includes:

- **ED-14:** Recognize the economic development benefits of city and private sector investments in urban amenities like arts and culture, open space and recreational facilities, and high-quality urban design. Strengthen the city's assets in these areas as an explicit component of the city's economic development strategy.

The “Urban Design & The Arts” element of the *Comprehensive Plan* includes:

- **UD-4:** Create a safe, engaging, and attractive pedestrian environment throughout the city using appropriate urban design features.
- **UD-58:** Provide a system of public places of various sizes and types throughout the community with a variety of experiences and accommodations.

Additionally, this program is supported by the *Economic Development Plan* adopted in 2020:

- **Capacity-Building and Partnerships 2:** Apply a partnership approach to strategies throughout economic development efforts to expand and improve service delivery.

Fiscal Impact

In 2022-23, Bellevue supported the public space management and activation partnership contract with funds totaling \$90,000. Project funds were a combination of General Fund, Grand Connection CIP, and Port of Seattle grant funds.

OPTIONS

N/A

ATTACHMENTS

- A. Memorandum of Agreement between the City of Bellevue and the Bellevue Downtown Association for the Downtown Activation and Placemaking Partnership
- B. Bellevue Downtown Association’s 2022 Strategic Plan

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N/A