



Bellevue Planning Commission

May 26, 2021

PLANNING COMMISSION STUDY SESSION ITEM

SUBJECT

Study Session on the Neighborhood Area Plans for Northeast Bellevue and Northwest Bellevue.

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POLICY ISSUES

Neighborhood Area Plans bring the City's broader vision to life in a local way. They provide guidance to City staff and consultants, those working on projects in the community, and others helping to shape our Neighborhoods' futures. By highlighting what is unique about each Neighborhood Area and the residents' aspirations for their community, Neighborhood Area Plans allow us to define a vision and a pathway toward that future. These plans are an essential part of implementing the Comprehensive Plan's Neighborhoods Element and act as a guiding beacon for future projects that may impact the neighborhoods in question. Northeast Bellevue and Northwest Bellevue is each facing a number of challenges that are addressed in the draft plans, many of which are challenges facing all Neighborhoods within the City but that impact these two Neighborhoods in unique ways. Both are feeling the impacts of growth and how that impacts the Neighborhoods and their natural environment and neighborhood character. In addition to policy issues around the physical areas, issues around community resilience and neighborhood cohesion are also addressed in these plans.

DIRECTION NEEDED FROM THE PLANNING COMMISSION

ACTION

DIRECTION

INFORMATION ONLY

These Plans are part of the annual Comprehensive Plan Amendment (CPA) process, returning for another study session at the next Commission meeting for additional review. Tonight's focus is on the Great Neighborhoods process and how that has influenced the themes of the Plans and included policies. Staff is seeking direction on these themes and how they have borne out in the plans. The next study session will focus on presenting the proposed goals and policies to the Commission and staff will be seeking specific feedback and direction on the Plans.

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.

Community Engagement

The Great Neighborhoods process allows for the community to take an active role in crafting their Neighborhood Area Plan. By bringing residents along from early visioning sessions, through brainstorming discussions and on to review of draft policies, staff have built the Plans around community feedback. On April 28, staff reviewed this approach and the associated events and outreach efforts with the Commission. Phase two of the process has now been completed, allowing staff to summarize the various outreach methods and overall community engagement efforts. Attachments A and B include a full Community Engagement Report highlighting overall statistics, themes, demographics, and other information. Attachments C and D include written comments received about these two neighborhoods throughout the 2020-2021 Great Neighborhoods process.

Since re-launching this effort in June of 2020, staff have held 10 online events open to each neighborhood, some of which were combined between the two neighborhoods with neighborhood-specific break-out rooms and some of which were unique to one neighborhood. The engagement reports (attachments A and B) include detailed information about each of these events, ranging from early visioning work through data discussions and topic-specific brainstorming sessions to review of the draft policies themselves. In addition, smaller discussions and presentations, online outreach efforts, and mailed information exchange were utilized. The chart below summarizes the totals for each of these methods. While Covid-19 provided challenges, staff believe that these engagement statistics, including the demographic information outlined in the Attachment A, represent a good range of voices that meets expectations based on previous engagement efforts and industry standards.

Method	Northeast Bellevue Community Members	Northwest Bellevue Community Members
Online Events (general)	10	10
Targeted Group or 1-on-1 Sessions	15	20
Cultural Outreach Assistants*	6 presentations and 76 meetings with individuals or organizations	
Engaging Bellevue:		
Aware	~2400	~1900
Informed	946 (out of 2400)	684 (out of 1900)
Engaged	320 (out of 946)	222 (out of 684)
Mailed Questionnaire	386+ (10% of households)	255+ (6% of households)

* Note, outreach done by Cultural Outreach Assistants was not neighborhood specific by necessity.

When staff presented to the Commission in April, a number of Commissioners expressed interest in comparing these engagement efforts to previous outreach efforts in these neighborhoods, particularly with the impact of Covid-19. The only recent comparisons where these particular neighborhoods were targeted come as part of the Neighborhood Enhancement Program (NEP). This program mails a survey out to households in the area in a very similar manner to the questionnaire that was sent to households in early April as part of Great Neighborhoods. When NEP last reached these neighborhoods, 14% of households in Northeast Bellevue and 11% of households in Northwest Bellevue returned the project ballot.

Commissioners were also interested in staff reaching out to traditionally underrepresented communities. The Cultural Outreach Assistants hired to reach out to the Chinese, Korean, South Asian, and Spanish-

speaking communities were chosen based on their ability to connect with the largest minority groups in these two neighborhoods, based on census data. Attachments A and B go into more detail on the benefits and challenges of this type of outreach, but it allowed us to connect with groups that have traditionally avoided working with the City on planning efforts. 2020 also provided unique challenges. Some groups, particularly those tied to the BIPOC community, were focused on more immediate challenges facing the community. Long-range planning efforts may have been lower priorities as a result. Staff's outreach efforts to minority groups included new approaches that have acted as a learning experience that will inform future efforts, such as the upcoming periodic Comprehensive Plan update.

Neighborhood Area Plans

As a portion of the Comprehensive Plan, Neighborhood Area Plans are adopted to guide future actions by the City and others working in the neighborhoods. They work hand-in-hand with other City documents, such as the Parks and Open Space Systems Plan and Vision Zero. The Neighborhood Area Plans define broad priorities and emphasize the desires of the community through a series of narratives and associated policies, while other City documents define specific actions that support and enhance these policies.

The policies within these plans define broad approaches that often can be accomplished in a number of different ways. For example, S-NW-12 states "Support efforts to create gathering opportunities, bringing together residents from different sub-neighborhoods, cultures, ages, or backgrounds." This could be achieved through many different means. The community has expressed how important it is to them that they have opportunities to gather and meet others, so they could themselves take this to heart and create an annual block party or barbecue event in a Park. The City could reference this policy in providing educational materials about how to appropriately permit a block party or by holding a summer camp for children in the area to learn about different cultures. This policy would be referenced by the Parks department when determining any changes to Northwest Bellevue's parks system to ensure that the priority of providing gathering spaces is upheld. Policies in these plans therefore identify the priority and support the listed goal, but they do not define a particular implementation strategy, code change, or other specific outcome.

These policies are supported by narrative throughout, shaping the overall vision for the community, defining the area's important themes, and discussing the opportunities and challenges targeted by the policies. The draft plans therefore include the following sections:

1. *A Vision Statement* to act as a beacon for the rest of the plan
2. *A Neighborhood Area Profile* to present information about what is unique about each neighborhood
3. *Neighborhood Context* that links the previous sections to the policies that follow by highlighting the main themes found within the neighborhood discussions and defining the "why" behind the policies themselves.
4. *Policies* to realize the Vision, including future plan directions. These are organized based on the *Challenges and Opportunities* facing the community that were identified by residents themselves.

An associated list of specific *Neighborhood Priorities* will be separately developed to record community feedback on potential implementation ideas.

In addition to the introduction of the Northeast Bellevue and Northwest Bellevue plans, these CPAs include the removal of the previous Northeast Bellevue and North Bellevue (the previous name for what is now Northwest Bellevue) plans. With the most recent major updates to these plans occurring in 1985 and 1983 respectively, the narrative and policies have been reviewed and incorporated into the new plans where remaining relevancy exists.

The existing subarea plans follow the old subarea boundaries. Policy N-13 of the Comprehensive Plan defines the continued relevance of previous boundaries and policies until new Neighborhood Area Planning efforts supersede them. While the Northwest Bellevue boundary does not differ from the old North Bellevue Boundary, the old Northeast Bellevue boundary differs in three places from the current Northeast Bellevue boundary, as can be seen in Attachment E. These three areas will be reconciled while otherwise leaving other subarea plans untouched. The land use plan in the Southeast Bellevue subarea plan will therefore be updated as part of this CPA to add on the two areas at the south edge of Northeast Bellevue that have transitioned over to Lake Hills and West Lake Sammamish, which are new Neighborhoods made up from the previous Southeast Bellevue Neighborhood. On the west edge of Northeast Bellevue, a portion of Crossroads has been added.

Attachment F includes the existing Crossroads subarea plan and page 14 includes the Land Use Plan which highlights in orange the area that will be removed from this plan and added to Northeast Bellevue. This includes all of District A and a portion of District B, which will be combined in the new Northeast plan to create a new District A. The relevant policies from the Crossroads subarea plan have been stricken if no longer relevant or transitioned over to the new plan, particularly S-NE-6 and S-NE-7, which ban multifamily and retail uses within all or a portion of this area. Because these restrictions apply to a larger area of Crossroads and are therefore a discussion that applies to this full area rather than only the piece that is transitioning to Northeast Bellevue, staff recommend holding a conversation about these policies as part of the larger Crossroads Neighborhood planning efforts in the future.

Plan Themes

Attachments G and H include the full draft plans for Commission review. While these will be discussed in more detail at the next study session, staff intends to highlight the overarching themes and how community input shaped those themes tonight. Attachments A and B include charts highlighting by neighborhood the themes that emerged regarding the community's positives (what to preserve) and negatives (challenges to address).

A number of themes impact both neighborhoods and get at larger themes that impact most of Bellevue neighborhoods. While these plans focus on what is unique to these neighborhoods, it is important to highlight these City-wide issues in order to understand and address the unique impacts on Northeast Bellevue and Northwest Bellevue. Both Neighborhoods value their trees, parks, and open space. Residents love their access to greenery and want to preserve it. They enjoy walking in their neighborhoods and hope to improve safety and sidewalks in the area.

With growth pressures and increased development, one of the biggest challenges woven throughout community events has been the preservation of trees. This growth is a theme that impacts many areas. Significant redevelopment of single-family lots has changed the character of many areas of the City, particularly in Northwest Bellevue and beginning in Northeast Bellevue as well. This intersects with the challenge of preserving trees and with the final City-wide theme that came up over and over: affordability. Areas with good access, great parks, and the other features enjoyed by Bellevue residents are desired by many. This has created a shortage of housing that has increased property values and

therefore property taxes. This pressure is felt in the Neighborhoods and brought up by residents searching for solutions, particularly for seniors on fixed incomes.

These City-wide themes are key to understanding the more Neighborhood-specific themes and resulting policies found within the draft plans. Both Neighborhoods have expressed a strong desire to be involved in the upcoming City-wide look at the codes related to tree preservation that is reflected in their policies. As the Neighborhood Area that has seen the most redevelopment of single-family lots in the last decade, Northwest Bellevue can be referenced to understand the impacts of existing policies on desired areas near Downtown Bellevue.

Both Neighborhoods are interested in walkability and alternatives to driving, but their priorities differ. In the questionnaire that was sent out (as highlighted in Attachments A and B), both Neighborhoods highlighted walking as a clear priority for transportation improvements. Northwest Bellevue in particular prioritized this far more than other methods. The remaining priorities for biking and transit also influenced policies in each draft plan. Residents provided feedback on particular areas or conditions for concern, which were also discussed with the Transportation Department and reflected in these plans. With Northwest Bellevue's proximity to Downtown and Northeast Bellevue's proximity to Microsoft, Overlake, BelRed, and Crossroads, certain areas came up as priorities or higher concerns for safety.

Some desires were of particular interest to one neighborhood or the other. Northeast Bellevue, which primarily consists of single-family homes, has an interest in better access to retail and other amenities that is much stronger than in Northwest Bellevue, which has a number of internal commercial areas and is close to Downtown. Northwest Bellevue, which has a lot of variety of housing types and sub-neighborhoods within its borders, includes a number of policies focusing on maintaining these unique areas and enhancing their distinction, particularly in comparison to Downtown's scale and activity.

Attachments G and H include narratives that set these priorities out clearly for each Neighborhood in more detail. The individual policies will be reviewed in further detail at the next study session.

Upcoming Schedule and Adoption Process

These two study sessions with Planning Commission will be followed by a Public Hearing in July. City Council will then be presented with Planning Commission's recommendations for the Northwest Bellevue and Northeast Bellevue neighborhood plans during the review of annual CPAs in the Fall.

- June 9 – Draft policies reviewed in more detail by the Planning Commission
- July 14 – Public hearing on Neighborhood Area Plans
- Fall 2021 – Council adoption of Comprehensive Plan Amendments

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: Community Engagement Report: Northeast Bellevue
Attachment B: Community Engagement Report: Northwest Bellevue
Attachment C: Northeast Bellevue Comments
Attachment D: Northwest Bellevue Comments
Attachment E: Neighborhood Area Boundaries Shift
Attachment F: Existing Crossroads Subarea Plan (highlighted)
Attachment G: Northeast Bellevue Draft Plan
Attachment H: Northwest Bellevue Draft Plan