



# Bellevue Downtown Association

# Strategic Plan





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# Executive Summary

*Fall 2022*

# Downtown Bellevue Is the Eastside's Engine

*Fall 2022*

Downtown Bellevue is where people want to be. It is a desirable destination for families because of high-quality schools, healthcare, public safety, and parks. It is a draw for top professional talent, as global technology firms and connections to regional transit increase its visibility and viability as a major employment center in the Pacific Northwest and vibrant urban city on Lake Washington.

Downtown Bellevue is not the same place it was a decade ago. Major employers call Downtown home, including Symetra, PACCAR, and Puget Sound Energy. Microsoft has had a significant presence in Downtown since 2007, and remains a strong regional partner. Technology companies continue to drive the current wave of growth with new office towers and mixed-use development. Downtown Bellevue is a global hub and talent magnet for game development companies like Bungie and Valve. International firms like ByteDance Ltd., the Beijing-based parent company of TikTok, plans to locate in Downtown Bellevue. Silicon Valley tech giants like Salesforce, SAP and eBay have also taken blocks of space, and Meta (Facebook) paid \$367 million in 2020 for a six-acre, 400,000 square-foot complex in the nearby Spring District.

The most prominent signal of the area's tech surge is Amazon's plans to employ 25,000 people Downtown as it looks to expand its Puget Sound headquarters. Much of this growth is by design and has been anticipated, but the desirability of Bellevue also creates challenges. Housing in general is very expensive for many and while employment opportunities continue to be strong, the challenge of finding affordable housing is acute. These issues are not new, and will continue to influence conversations about change and growth.

Downtown Bellevue is also much more diverse than it was even 10 years ago. More than half of Downtown's residents are people of color and many are born outside of the United States who are coming to Bellevue to take advantage of strong employment opportunities, good schools, and a safe community. Converging cultures and interests also create an energy in Downtown that continues to grow the services, entertainment, food, music, and other offerings that make Downtown a unique location on the Eastside. What was once a 9-to-5 office district is now evolving into something more dynamic and exciting.





# The Bellevue Downtown Association Strategic Plan

The Bellevue Downtown Association (BDA) has guided and supported Downtown Bellevue's positive growth and evolution for 50 years. With the rapid change in Downtown and the new initiatives desired by its members, the BDA launched a collaborative strategic planning process in 2022 to identify a new collective vision and series of actions that will guide and support the growth and change occurring in Downtown Bellevue. The future of BDA is as a membership organization that advances dialogue and plans to help Downtown thrive, grows its advocacy opportunities, and continues to lead in making Downtown the place to be for residents, businesses, and visitors. Based on findings and existing conditions as of Fall 2022, the 2023-2027 Bellevue Downtown

Association Strategic Plan establishes a bolder path for the next five years and beyond, building upon existing programs and plans with new strategies that support opportunities and trends in Downtown. An integral part of the Strategic Plan is a set of goals and strategies that leverage limited resources, foster partnerships, and provide a positive economic development environment. Strategies reflect the voices of stakeholders and respond to both immediate and future opportunities and challenges.

The Strategic Plan provides a roadmap that will ensure that the collective objectives of stakeholders are accomplished in a comprehensive, inclusive, and sustainable way.



## Big Moves

1. Place a central focus on leadership and resources for placemaking and the quality of Downtown's public realm.
2. Develop new community partnerships to support existing events and to bring diverse communities Downtown.
3. Focus on providing transportation access and choices for commuters, residents, and visitors.
4. Expand the BDA's data, research, and reporting capacity.
5. Increase attention on the vibrancy of the retail experience at the street level.
6. Develop new revenue sources to implement strategic plan priorities.

## Goals

**Goal 1** Activate Safe and Attractive Downtown Spaces

**Goal 2** Bring the Community Downtown to Celebrate

**Goal 3** Champion Improvements to Transportation Access, Connectivity, and Choices

**Goal 4** Advocate for Downtown's Economy with Data and Research

**Goal 5** Support Downtown's Storefront and Retail Economy

**Goal 6** Strengthen the BDA to Take on New Initiatives



A man with dreadlocks and round sunglasses is playing an acoustic guitar and singing into a microphone. He is wearing a floral patterned shirt. The background is a blue and white striped canopy. A large white number '01' is overlaid on the right side of the image, partially obscured by a green brushstroke.

01

Introduction



# Introduction

*Fall 2022*

Downtown Bellevue is where people want to be. It is a desired destination for families because of its high-quality schools and parks. It is also a draw for top professional talent, as global technology brands and connections to regional transit increase its visibility and viability as a major employment center in the Pacific Northwest and vibrant urban city on Lake Washington.

Downtown Bellevue is the economic hub of the City and continues to experience tremendous growth. It is not the same downtown as it was a decade ago. New companies have opened corporate headquarters in Downtown Bellevue, including several of the region's largest employers. Downtown Bellevue also continues to diversify its shopping, dining, and entertainment options, supported by new residential development. What was once a 9-to-5 office district is now evolving into something more dynamic and exciting. But there is still much work to do.

The Bellevue Downtown Association (BDA) has been an integral partner in Downtown Bellevue's positive growth and change for 50 years. With the rapid change in Downtown and the new services desired by its members, the BDA has initiated a collaborative strategic planning process to identify a new collective vision and series of actions that will support the growth and change occurring in Downtown Bellevue. The future of BDA is an organization that facilitates discussions, grows its advocacy and opportunities, and continues to lead in making Downtown the place to be for residents, businesses, and visitors.

## **2023-2027 Bellevue Downtown Association Strategic Plan**

The BDA Strategic Plan establishes a path for the next five years and beyond, building upon existing programs and plans with new strategies that support opportunities and trends in Downtown. An integral part of the Strategic Plan is a set of Goals and Strategies that leverage limited resources, foster collaborations, and provide a positive economic development environment. Strategies reflect the voices of stakeholders and respond to both immediate and future opportunities and challenges.

The Strategic Plan provides a road map that will ensure that the collective objectives of stakeholders are accomplished in a comprehensive, inclusive, and sustainable way.



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# Economic Impact of Downtown Bellevue

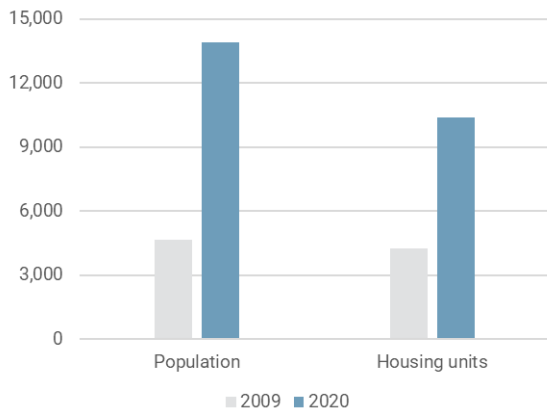
*Data and existing conditions collected  
Summer/Fall 2022*

# Downtown is Becoming More Diverse, Reflecting Regional Trends

## Demographic Changes Over Time (2009 – 2020)

Downtown Bellevue is more populated and more diverse than the City as a whole, doubling in size in the last 15 years to nearly 15,000 residents. More than 50% of residents are people of color; they are also younger, with fewer children under 18 than the City as a whole.

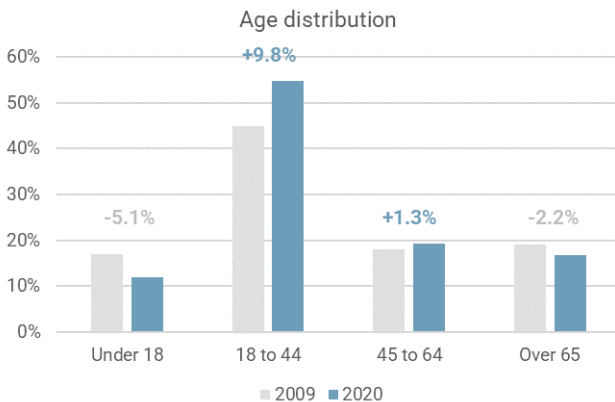
### Population and Housing Units Downtown



**Population Increase +197.5%**      **Housing Units +144.0%**

Source: Neighborhood Community Diversity / Housing Profile, City of Bellevue

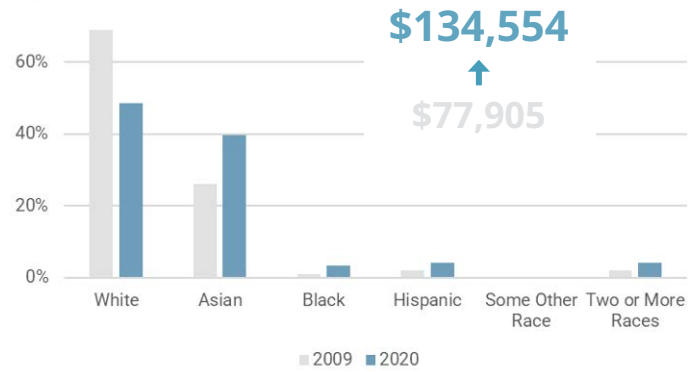
### Age Distribution



Source: Neighborhood Community Diversity / Housing Profile, City of Bellevue

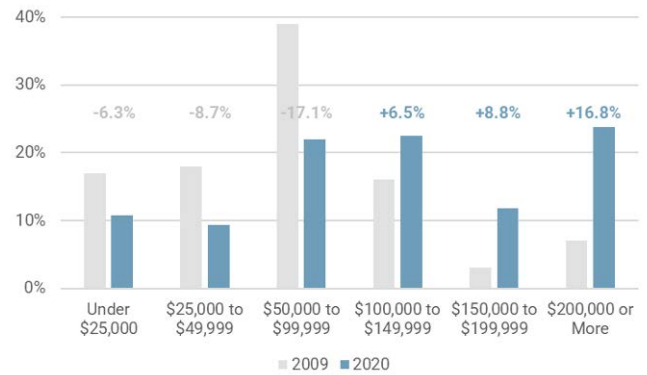
Downtown also attracts wealthier households, with the highest income brackets choosing to locate Downtown in much higher percentages than other parts of the City. The average household income in Downtown has increased from \$77,000 to more than \$130,000, with the number of households earning more than \$200,000 growing by 17 percentage points.

### Percent People of Color and HH Income



Source: Neighborhood Community Diversity, City of Bellevue

### Average Household Income



Source: Neighborhood Community Diversity, City of Bellevue



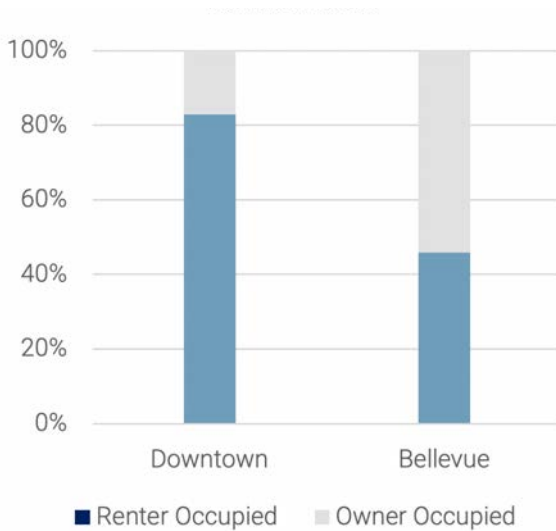
# Housing is Growing More Expensive

Due to the large percentage of renter-occupied housing in Downtown, the rental market exerts a greater influence on the residents than in other parts of the City. One-bedroom apartments in Downtown typically rent for \$2,820 per month, higher than in neighboring cities like Seattle.

There are few rental units below \$2,000, limiting the choice of housing at different price points.

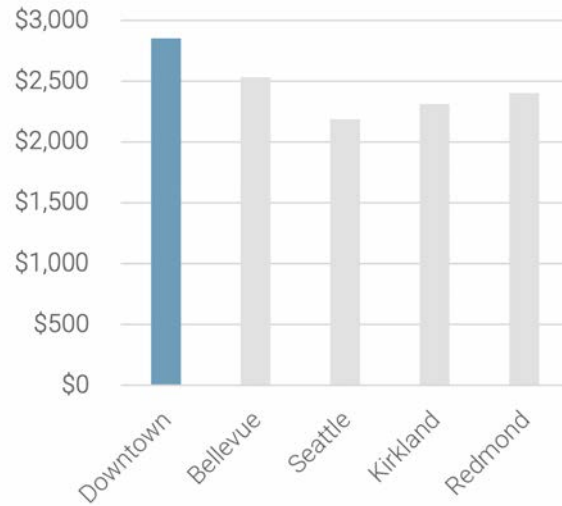
About 80% of all rental units are more than \$2,000. Between 2021 and 2022, rents are increased by 16-27% for different housing types. Approximately 8% of the rental units Downtown have more than one person per room, which is higher than the City and the statewide average (3%), potentially indicating that rent prices are requiring renters to double up to afford housing Downtown.

## Renters Versus Owners



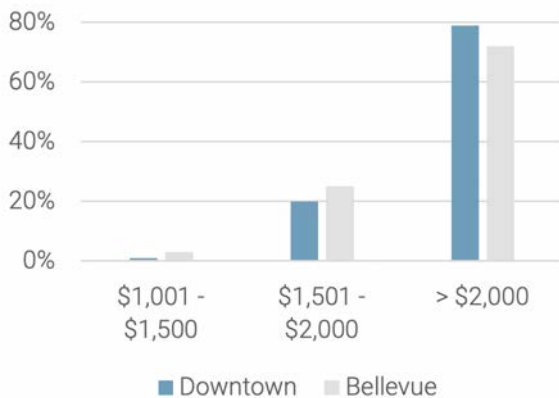
Source: US Census Planning Database 2021

## 1Br Average Rent



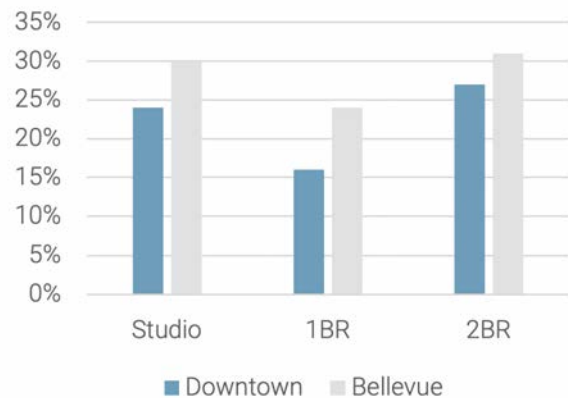
Source: Rentcafe / Zumper Market data, May 2022

## Rent Ranges



Source: Rentcafe / Zumper Market data, May 2022

## 2021-2022 YoY Rent Change



Source: Rentcafe / Zumper Market data, May 2022

# COVID-19 Has Affected Downtown

## WORK FROM HOME

Bellevue was like most other downtowns in terms of the impact associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Large numbers of employees began working from home as the pandemic grew, which reduced the amount of traffic, transit usage, and other modes of travel (see also page 25 for use by mode). While many have begun to return to work,

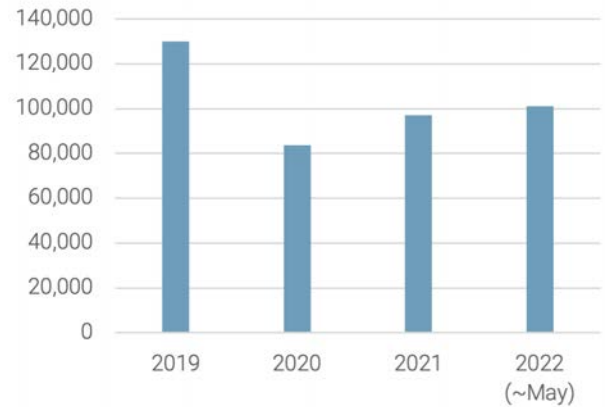
either full-time or on hybrid schedules, the reduction in the number of people working in traditional offices has affected businesses that tended to support those employees. The long-term impacts of COVID-19 are still unknown, but it has likely changed many people's perception of how downtowns and other destinations function, and how those areas could develop over time.

### Total Daily Trips (Downtown)



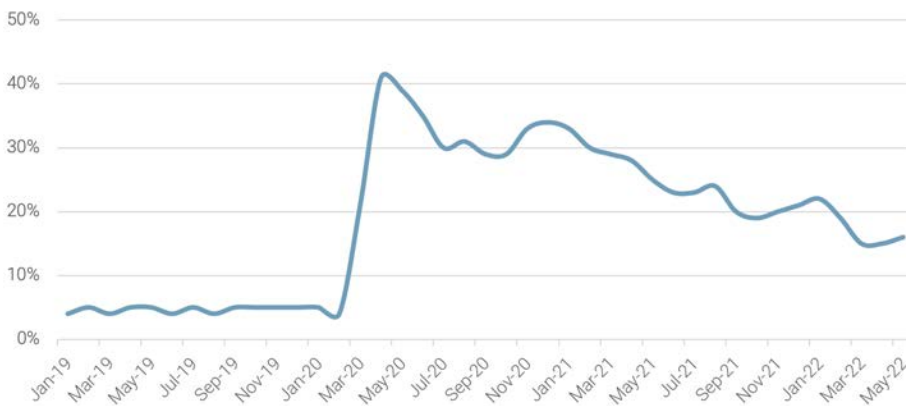
Source: Mobility Data (Jan 2019 - May 2022), Replica

### Average Monthly Trip Count (Downtown)



Source: Mobility Data (Jan 2019 - May 2022), Replica

### Working From Home (Downtown)



Source: Mobility Data (Jan 2019 - May 2022), Replica

# Downtown Leads Bellevue's Economy

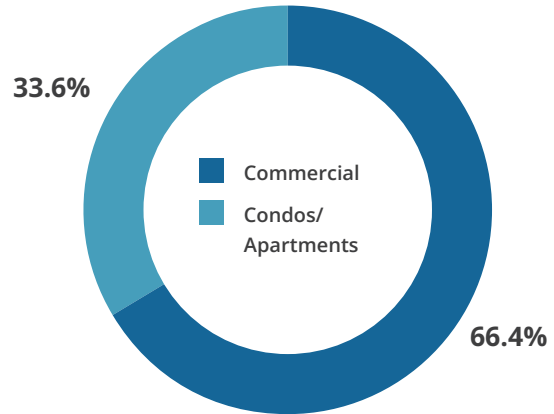
Downtown Bellevue rivals the size and scale of many central business districts and downtowns of larger cities around the country. With a total asset value of over \$17 billion, over 10 million square feet of office space, nearly 8,120 residential units, and almost 3,600 hotel rooms, Downtown is a major economic engine for Bellevue and the Eastside.

## Appraised Value and Property Tax

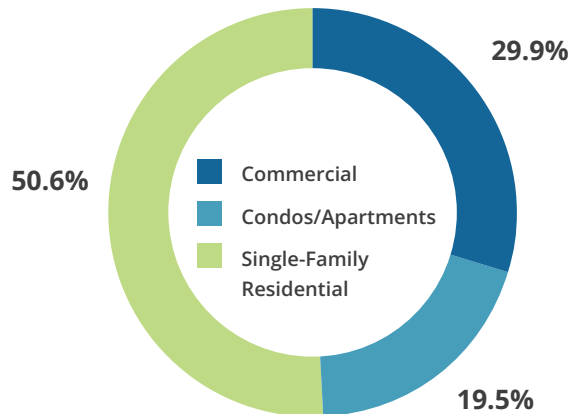
While the number of properties in Downtown Bellevue is only 6.3% of the City, the appraised value of these properties is 22% of the total, indicating relatively high-value buildings in a relatively small district compared to the City as a whole. County Assessor's data shows Downtown's total appraised value at approximately \$17,893,060,000, resulting in annual property tax revenue of approximately \$15,027,600.

The majority of properties in Downtown are commercial (66.4%) and condo/apartment (33.6%), while residential properties comprise about half of the City's total properties. Commercial properties in Downtown Bellevue represent 49% of the entire City's appraised value of commercial properties, and condos/apartments account for 38%, suggesting the two types of properties dominate Downtown.

Properties (Downtown)



Properties (Citywide)



Source: Taxpayer Transparency Tool, King County Assessor's Office



## Employment / Building SqFt

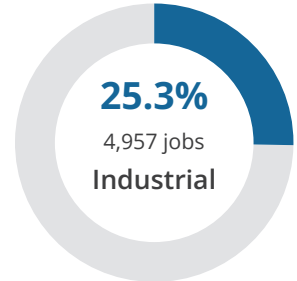
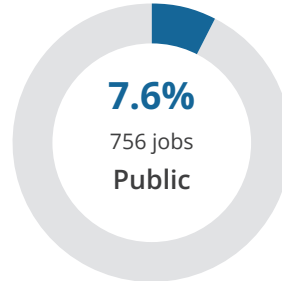
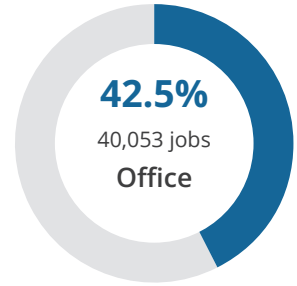
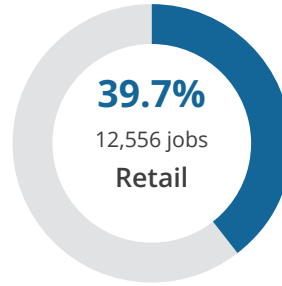
While Downtown Bellevue takes up a small portion of the City's land (about 2%), it provides a significant amount of job opportunities and economic value. About 40% of retail and office employment is concentrated in the Downtown area.

## Office Vacancy Rates and Lease Rates

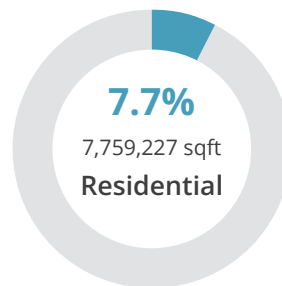
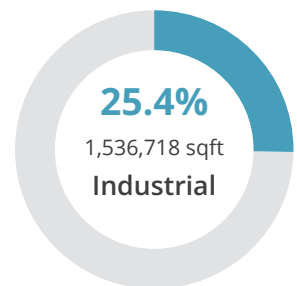
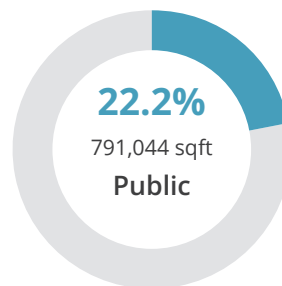
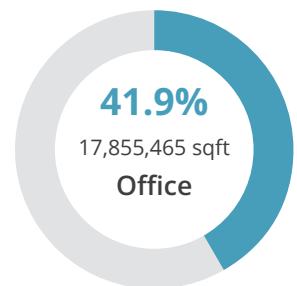
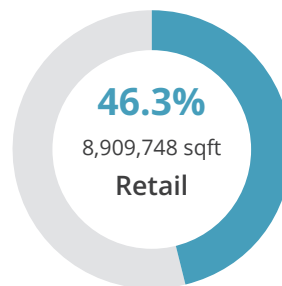
The pandemic has slowed near-term plans for employees to move back into offices. Although it is unknown when employees will return to physical offices in large numbers, rental rates have reportedly increased, and the Eastside is predicted to return to pre-pandemic vacancy rates in 2022, according to Colliers, a commercial real estate company. New office space in appealing Downtown neighborhoods has proven a valuable recruiting tool for tech firms competing for workers, such as Amazon, Google, and Facebook.

There is demand for high-quality space, but the vacancy rate for Class A properties in the Bellevue CBD is only 4.8%, which does not provide many options. This tight supply is related to the demand for tech space. Downtown Bellevue is similar to other Eastside cities where more than two-thirds of recent tenant demand is from tech companies. This reduces the ability of smaller companies in the market to have a chance to lease space.

## Downtown Jobs (Percentage of Bellevue)



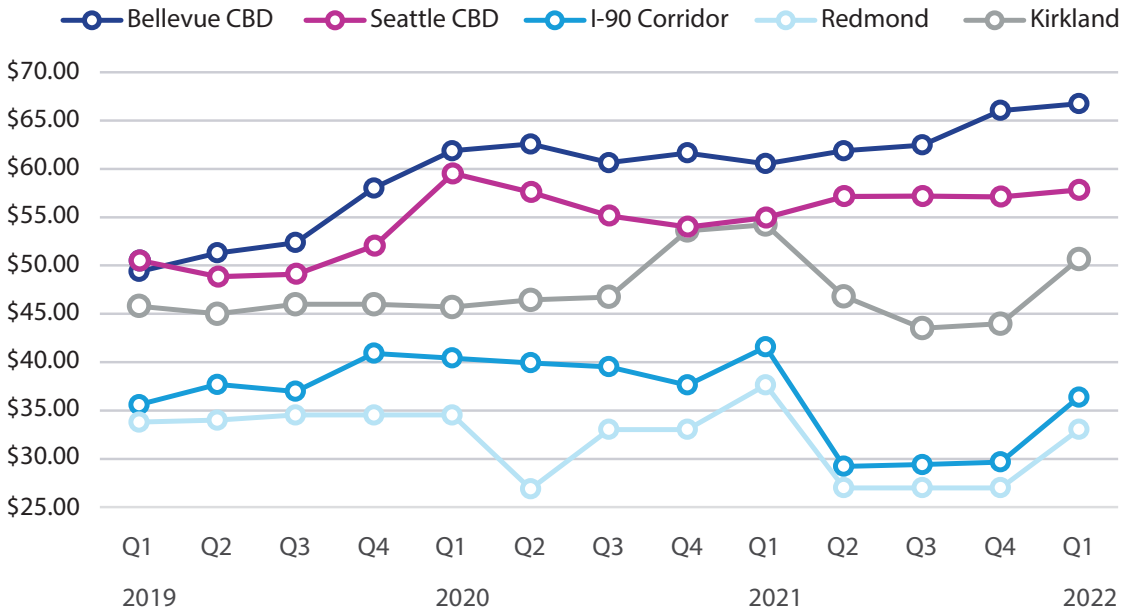
## Downtown Square Footage (Percentage of Bellevue)



Source: UrbanFootprint (CoreLogic Real Estate Data)

## Class A Rental Rates

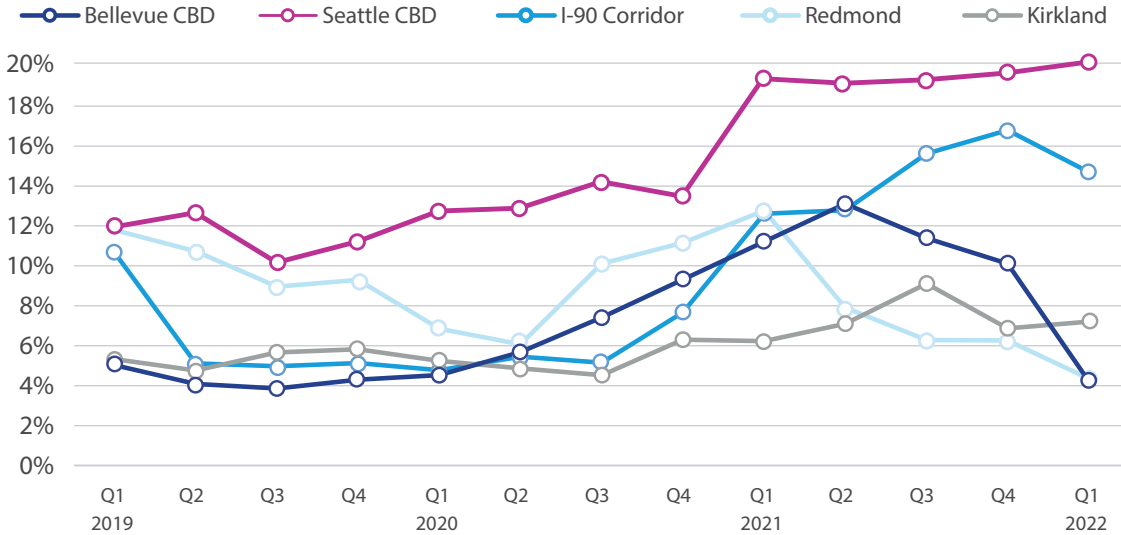
### Direct Annual Asking Rates (Full Service)



Source: UrbanFootprint (CoreLogic Real Estate Data)

## Overall Vacancy

### Quarterly by Submarket Direct Vacant and Sublease Available



Source: Seattle/Eastside Office Report Q1 2022, Colliers

It is near capacity in Bellevue CBD as there is a limited supply to attract more companies to the market. The development pipeline is already 89% committed, leaving few options for tenants seeking space. In other words, they'll be under pressure to renew in place or look for expansion opportunities

in similar high-quality buildings in other parts of the market, including Seattle. Meta is already taking advantage of space outside the Bellevue CBD along the Willows Corridor, which is likely to be 200,000 square feet.

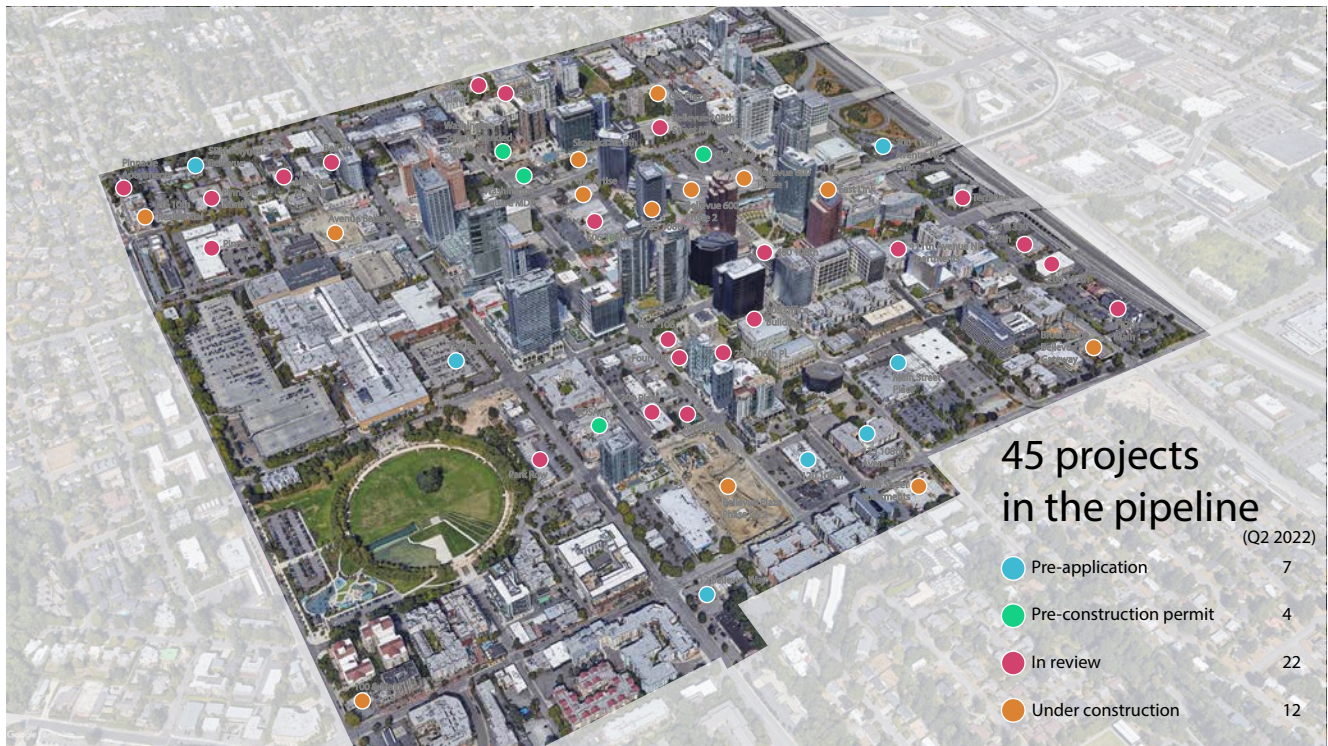
## Major New Development is Happening

While COVID-19 continues to influence development choices, many companies have maintained plans to lease and/or construct a significant amount of new office square footage and residential units. Tech companies are driving an unprecedented economic expansion in Bellevue. Downtown is booming with new developments including office towers and mixed-use complexes.

There are a number of outstanding examples that highlight the attractiveness of Downtown for new employers. Downtown Bellevue is a global hub and talent magnet for game development companies like Bungle and Valve. Corporations like ByteDance Ltd., the Beijing-based parent company of TikTok, plans to locate in Downtown Bellevue. Silicon Valley tech giants like Salesforce, SAP and eBay are also acquiring space, and Meta (Facebook) paid

\$367 million in 2020 for a six-acre, 400,000 square-foot complex in the nearby Spring District. Long time businesses such as Symetra, PACCAR, and Puget Sound Energy continue to be key Downtown employers.

The most prominent signal of the area's tech surge is Amazon, which humbly started in a small Bellevue house 27 years ago. It now plans to employ 25,000 people Downtown as it looks beyond its Seattle headquarters. Amazon's gradual expansion and integration of 25,000 jobs during the next several years will accelerate the transformation and momentum already underway, diversifying the local economy. These new businesses are bolstering an already strong technology presence, such as Microsoft's large presence in Downtown since 2007, and supporting an enhanced neighborhood for those that live and work here.



Source: Major Projects Downtown, Building Bellevue Map, City of Bellevue Development Services (Q2022)



# Downtown Continues to Grow as a Shopping and Entertainment Center

## Shopping

Bellevue's Downtown has developed into one of the Pacific Northwest's foremost retail, dining and entertainment destinations, boasting a wide variety of bold, eclectic, and international shopping experiences. All walkable and in close proximity, these enticing places are highlighted by the impressive number of available brands, range of shopping categories, quantity of upscale shops, department stores, boutiques and vintage retailers, dining, and luxury accommodation options. The most popular destinations are The Bellevue Collection, The Shops at the Bravern and the lively local shops, cafes, and restaurants on Main Street and in Old Bellevue.

## Entertainment

Cultural experiences and family entertainment are abundant in Bellevue and the nightlife is buzzing with new opportunities. Bellevue's signature arts fair weekend, featuring the Bellevue Arts Museum Arts Fair and the BDA's Downtown Arts Market, is a nationally-recognized event held each July and attracts tens of thousands of visitors. The two fairs include more than 400 juried artists, art exhibitions, live music, food trucks, and a kid's fair. Additional seasonal events include the Bellevue

Family 4th, Bellevue Downtown Ice Rink, and The Bellevue Collection's Snowflake Lane. The Bellevue Collection is also host to Fashion Week, a celebration of fall fashion with runway shows, trunk shows, seminars, and VIP shopping. The Collection also hosts two state-of-the-art Cinemark theaters, offering 22 screens, IMAX, and luxurious chairs.

Music has deep roots in Bellevue. The Wintergrass Festival takes center stage with bluegrass and acoustic music over four days in February at the Hyatt Regency Bellevue. The BDA presents the Bellevue Jazz & Blues Music Series, featuring an elite lineup of Northwest and national musicians at free and ticketed performances each spring. The Theatre at Meydenbauer Center hosts an array of productions by local, regional, and national performing arts groups. Bake's Place Bar & Bistro—a live music, bar, and restaurant venue—presents a year-round calendar of top local, regional, and national artists. KidsQuest Children's Museum offers hands-on and playful learning for kids and people of all ages, adding to the diversity of cultural options and family fun in Downtown.



## NEW DEVELOPMENT FOR SHOPPING, ENTERTAINMENT AND EMPLOYERS

### **The Bellevue**

The nearly 2 million square-foot mixed-used luxury development, called The Bellevue, will be a five-star destination, featuring luxe retail and dining, residential, hospitality, and a health and wellness resort. Highlights of The Bellevue four-tower luxury destination include: Over 140,000 square feet of shopping and dining; a 160-room five-star hotel; 234 luxury residences; and a premier urban resort for health and well-being.

### **West Main**

Vulcan's mixed-use development is located on 106th Avenue Northeast. It was previously a strip mall, which included Toy's Café, Jimmy John's, and Jiffy Lube. The half-block development will feature close to 1 million square feet of office space and approximately 30,00 square feet of retail space, with north and south towers 17 stories tall and a 15-story middle tower.

### **Bellevue 600 - Phase 1**

Phase 1 of Amazon's Bellevue 600 includes a 43-story office tower above six below-grade parking levels with 992 parking stalls. The tower will provide 1,140,035 square feet of new office space. Other improvements include an outdoor plaza space, a major public open space, two through-block pedestrian connections, landscaping, lighting, and construction of a 30-foot-wide section of the Major Pedestrian Corridor.

### **Broadstone Bellevue Gateway**

Broadstone Bellevue Gateway includes a 22-story independent living tower comprised of 155 units, and two 7-story multifamily buildings, featuring 190 units. There will be a total of 345 units and about 8,000 square feet of ground floor restaurant and retail space.

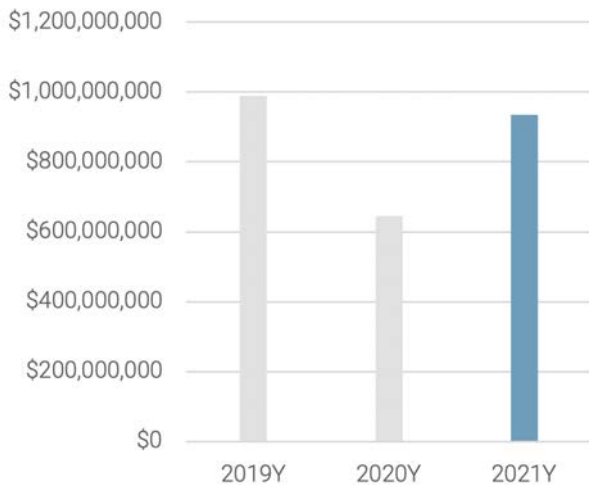
## Consumer Spending

COVID-19 has had a profound effect on the Downtown economy. While some impacts are likely attributed to work-from-home and hybrid schedules, previously established business practices have had to reshape expectations as businesses reopen. Unlike many other downtowns, Downtown Bellevue has begun to rebound quickly, and while not yet at the levels of 2019 and pre-pandemic, many sectors are showing significant improvement. The following charts illustrate the key sectors within Downtown.

Downtown’s largest spending category is retail, accounting for 63% of total consumption, followed by restaurants and bars at 23%.

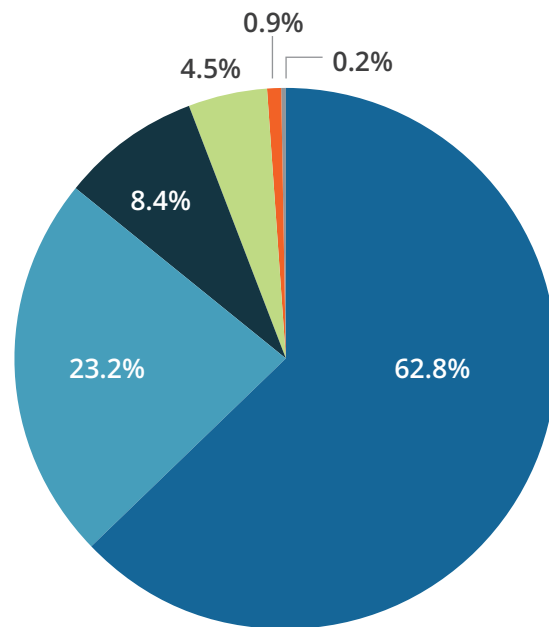
Retail has rebounded since 2019 and other spending categories, such as groceries, actually grew significantly since 2019. Other spending categories like restaurants and bars, entertainment, and recreation have yet to recover.

### Consumer Spending in Downtown Bellevue



Source: Consumer Spend data, Replica

### Downtown Spending By Category 2019-2021

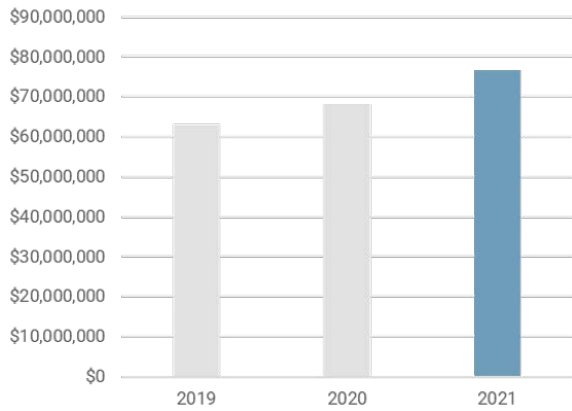


- Retail
- Restaurants / Bars
- Grocery Stores
- Airline / Hospitality / Car Rental
- Entertainment / Recreation
- Gas Stations / Parking / Taxis / Tolls

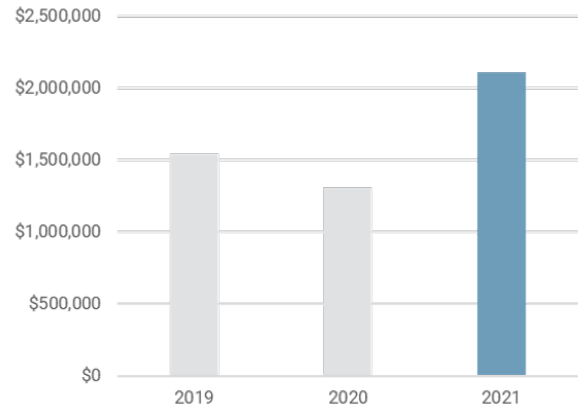
Source: Consumer Spend data, Replica



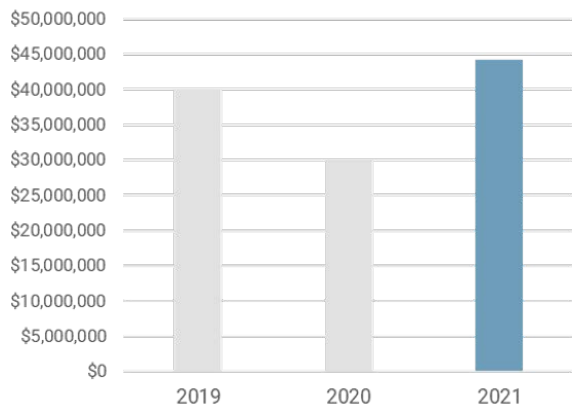
### Grocery Stores



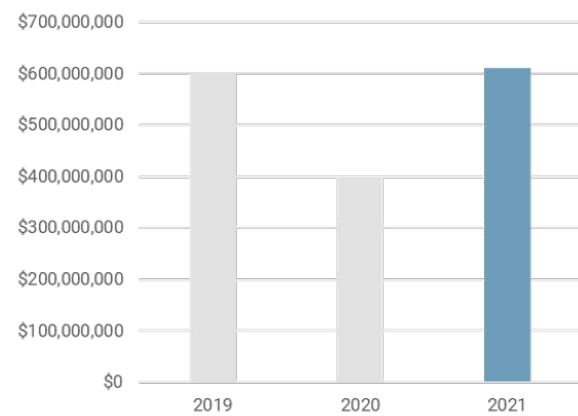
### Gas Stations / Parking / Taxis /Tolls



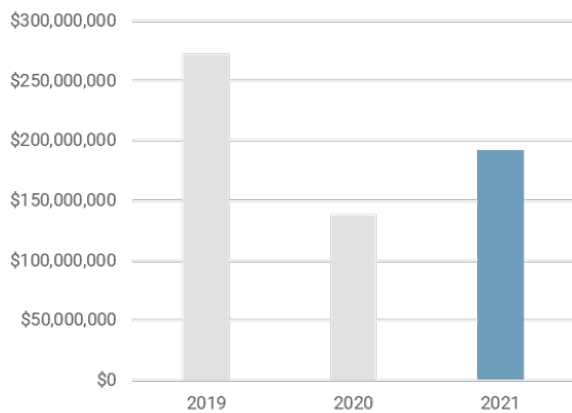
### Airline / Hospitality / Car Rental



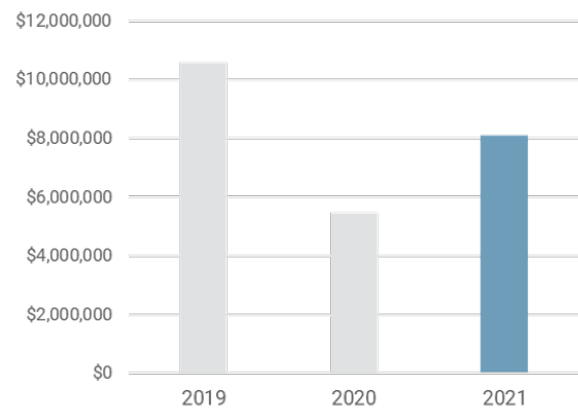
### Retail



### Restaurants / Bars



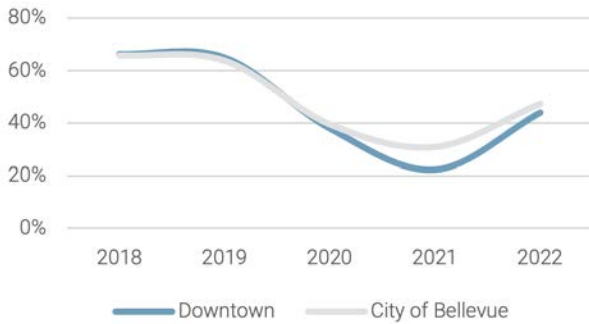
### Entertainment / Recreation



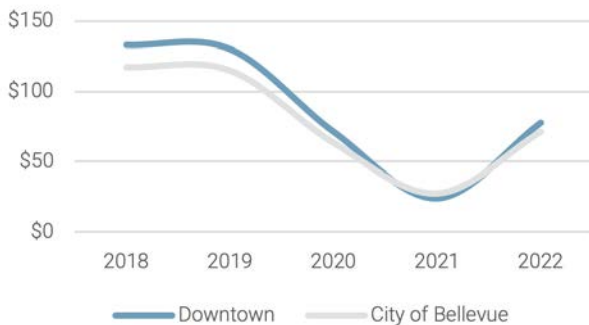
Source: for all charts: Consumer Spend data, Replica

Downtown hotels have also struggled since 2019, but are slowly recovering. Downtown hotels are likely more affected than hotels in other locations due to lower numbers of business travelers.

### Downtown Occupancy



### RevPAR



Source for charts above: Visit Bellevue Washington Report May 2022, STR

## Getting Around Downtown is Changing

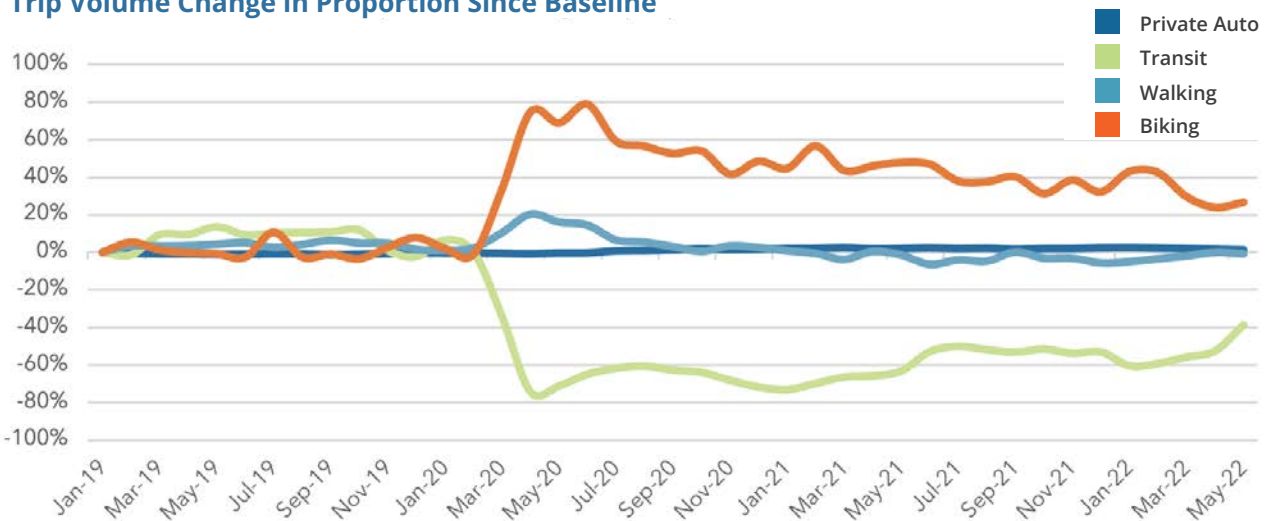
### Downtown was Built for Cars and is Evolving to Include Other Choices

#### MODE SPLIT

A private automobile is the most popular mode of transportation in Downtown Bellevue, accounting for about 80% of all options, and will likely continue to be the dominant mode of transportation for the foreseeable future. However, new offerings may begin to shift Downtown's reliance on single-occupancy vehicles for other modes of travel to some degree. New light rail lines that connect both adjacent districts and other urban centers like downtown Seattle will have an impact on mode split.

COVID-19 did affect how people moved around. Public transportation was hit the hardest, and while ridership is slowly rebounding, the light rail opening will increase its usage. The most significant positive change as a result of the pandemic is the increase in both bicycle and walking trips Downtown. The challenge for Downtown is to retain those gains. There are

### Trip Volume Change in Proportion Since Baseline



Source: Mobility Data (Jan 2019 - May 2022), Replica

few dedicated bike lanes, and while Downtown boasts wide sidewalks, traffic is fast with no on-street parking to act as a buffer, and the wide intersections make it very uncomfortable for pedestrians to cross. All of these factors, coupled with long super-blocks and limited east/west connections, can make walking more challenging than in other cities.

### **CURB SPACE AND MOBILITY OPTIONS WILL INFORM THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT**

Bellevue's rapid growth and diversifying mobility options has created a competition for curbside areas in Downtown; this includes a number of mobility options—both public and private—that will use curbside areas throughout Downtown. Activity at the curbside is expected to increase.

In addition to handling traffic pressure, rideshare and delivery services have expanded, adding operational and safety challenges to the public transportation system. Several large companies also offer private commuter shuttle services for their employees, including Amazon, Microsoft, and Expedia. These services often require dedicated curb spaces for loading and unloading passengers. Stakeholders identified these services as having both positive and negative impacts on the road network.

In response to the curb usage, the City is drafting a curb management plan. Aside from more traditional uses of curb areas, such as on-street parking, bus stops, and travel lanes, new mobility options for moving people and goods will also be included in the curb management plan that defines how the curb space should be used to meet the demands of Downtown residents and employees. The Curb Management Plan will include the following uses:

- Rideshare services
- Employer-operated shuttles, such as Microsoft's Connector service
- Loading/unloading spots for freight delivery providers
- EV Charging Stations
- Micro-mobility: e-scooters and bicycles
- Streetscape enhancement: green areas, parklets

Providing options for curbside management will reduce existing conflicts with motorists and other users.

### **Light Rail Will Offer More Options**

#### **REGIONAL CONNECTIONS**

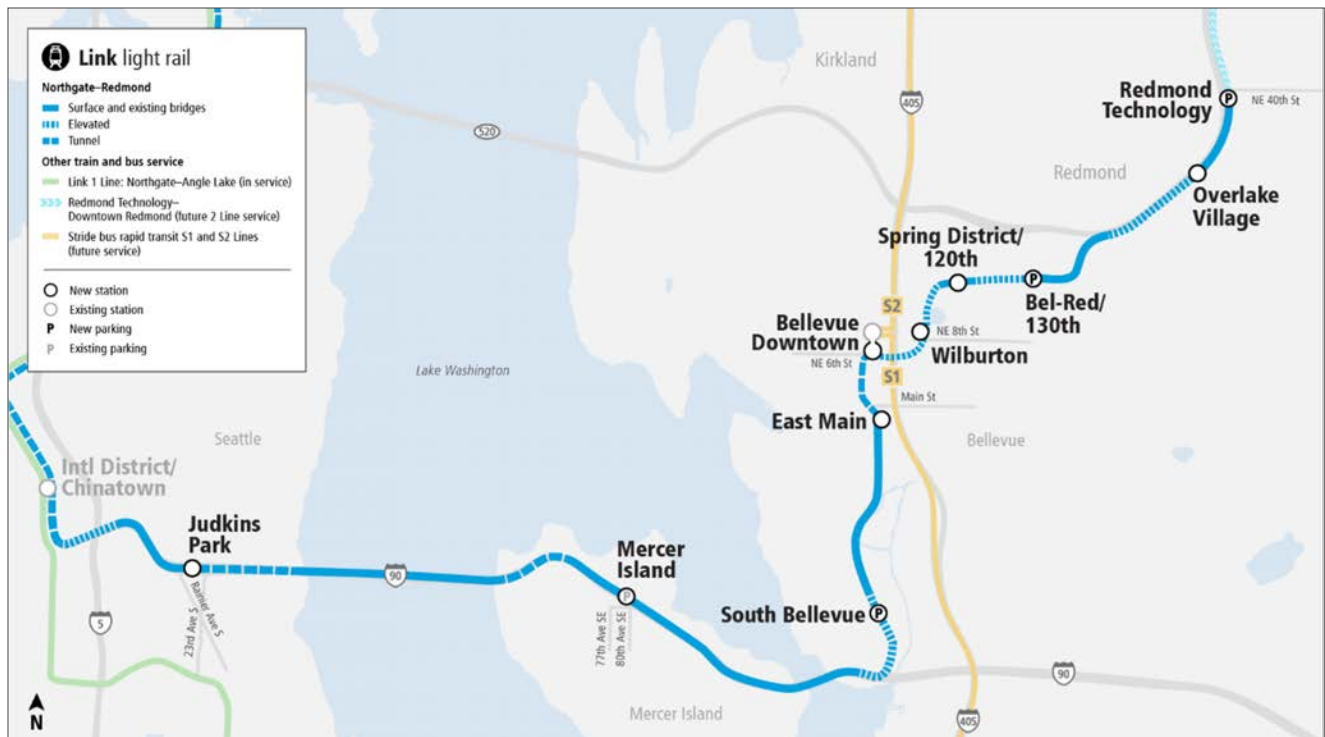
In April 2016, Sound Transit broke ground on the \$3.7 billion East Link light rail extension. The 14-mile route includes 10 stations and runs from downtown Seattle to Mercer Island and Bellevue, and then to Overlake in Redmond. When East Link opens in 2025, passengers will be able to ride almost 40 miles of fast, reliable light rail, from the Eastside to downtown Seattle and Northgate, and Sea-Tac Airport and Angle Lake. Bellevue Downtown Station is expected to serve approximately 7,000 daily boardings (2030).



## CONNECTIONS TO SPRING AND WILBURTON

Sound Transit light rail will serve Bellevue with six stations in the 2024-2025 timeframe, and I-405 BRT service will open shortly after. The Eastside Rail Corridor is being built out as a vital walking and biking connection, and is a unique element of the developing neighborhood. It will serve as a north to south multimodal spine, connecting Wilburton to Bel-Red. Complementing the corridor is the “Grand Connection,” an east-west

pathway from Meydenbauer Bay to the Eastside Rail Corridor. Most immediately, it could go a long way toward addressing the scarcity of safe and comfortable ways for bikes and pedestrians to cross I-405, connecting the Downtown Bellevue to the Wilburton neighborhood.



Source: East Link Extension, Sound Transit



## The East Link Extension

**Length:** 14 miles; 10 stations

**Service:** Every 8 minutes in peak hours

**Projected travel times:**

- Bellevue Downtown to University of Washington: 30 min
- Bellevue to International District/Chinatown: 20 min
- Bellevue to Sea-Tac Airport: 50 min
- Bellevue to Redmond Technology: 10 min

*Source: East Link Extension, Sound Transit*







03

Mission and Vision



## Mission

The Bellevue Downtown Association (BDA) is a nonprofit organization that strengthens the economic prosperity and cultural vitality of Downtown Bellevue.

## Vision

Downtown Bellevue is the vibrant, accessible, economic, and cultural heart of the Eastside.

Downtown Bellevue is a:

- Vital, livable, accessible, and welcoming community
- Creative center for global talent and innovative businesses
- Thriving retail, dining, and entertainment destination
- Growing, diverse residential neighborhood
- Supportive partner to surrounding districts and neighborhoods

## Values That Guide the BDA and Its Actions

1. **Inclusive Leadership, Collaboration and Advocacy** – Invite and unite a broad range of constituents and partners in developing and implementing strategies for Downtown’s future.
2. **Economic Vitality and Livability** – Ensure that Downtown serves many communities of interest and is a high-quality place to invest and to live, work, play, and visit.
3. **Celebration** – Make Downtown the place where the community celebrates Bellevue’s economic, dynamic, creative, and diverse community.

# 04

## Opportunities and Issues

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# Opportunities and Issues

This five-year Strategic Plan establishes a trajectory for an organization that has had great success in creating a vital Downtown Bellevue. It is also a time to confirm a direction and reflect on the input from its members and broader constituency about the effectiveness of current programs, initiatives, and funding options.

Opportunities and issues were identified through several focus groups and individual interviews, a community survey, and conversations with the BDA Board of Directors. This provided the foundation for goals and strategies, incorporating perspectives of those who live, work, own buildings, and experience Downtown Bellevue.

The research and engagement process occurred between March and June 2022. These activities provided substantial insights into the assessment of how the BDA is achieving its vision and collected a range of ideas for future opportunities and challenges in Downtown Bellevue.

## Focus Groups and Interviews

The project team completed 10 focus groups, and individual interviews were conducted as part of the stakeholder/member engagement. Participants were from diverse groups related to Downtown Bellevue, including:

- Major business employers
- Property owners
- Developers
- City staff

All participants had a prior understanding of the BDA and its role with Downtown Bellevue. Participants were asked to describe opportunities and challenges for the BDA and Downtown

Bellevue, and share where they think the BDA should focus attention on during the next several years. A summary of the results of focus groups and interviews is included in Appendix A.

## Online Surveys

More than 250 people responded to an online survey that gathered input from varied businesses and residents in and near Downtown. In addition to providing detailed input, this activity provided an enhanced understanding of Downtown Bellevue's opportunities and challenges, as well as priorities for its future. A summary of the results of the online survey is included in Appendix A.

## BDA Board Workshops

The BDA Board Workshop was held in person on May 17, 2022, and included 27 Board members. The meeting featured a presentation that highlighted Downtown Bellevue's successes over the past year and fast-changing trends in the Downtown and adjacent neighborhoods, along with a lively work session. The consulting team gathered ideas from the Board members about current status, opportunities, and challenges for the future of Downtown Bellevue.

On July 19, 2022, the Board reviewed a series of goals and targeted "big moves" that could be included in the Strategic Plan. Information gathered from this meeting provided the foundation for the goals and strategies described in Chapter 5.

The project team's outreach generated hundreds of comments and insights to understand the current status of Downtown and develop ideas for the future. The result of the input is described on the following pages.



## Success in Carrying Out its Mission

Participants were asked how successful the BDA has been in carrying out its mission and what key roles the BDA has played.

- The BDA is a trusted Downtown partner and convener
- The BDA's expertise in placemaking has helped enliven Downtown
- The BDA is known for its ability to attract people to Downtown through high-quality events, particularly for families and kids
- Downtown Bellevue benefits from the BDA's advocacy for mobility, land use, and walkability
- The BDA represents the business community well
- The BDA has strong connections to numerous nonprofit organizations that broaden its reach outside of Downtown

## Opportunities and Issues for the BDA and Downtown

There are many opportunities and challenges that the BDA can lead or assist in addressing. While not all are responsibilities of the BDA, many of the following opportunities and issues relate to the BDA's values and recommendations for future actions.



## IDENTITY & BRANDING

- The BDA is perceived as a leading voice for the City and an organization that activates Downtown
- Despite the BDA's great work, its outcomes are not always identified or well-recognized; it needs to continue building a staff that reflects the broad number of initiatives it can lead or support
- The difference between the BDA and the Bellevue Chamber is not well understood in regards to advocacy and certain issues
- Where does the BDA want to go? It can do more than put on events (which it does a great job of)



## BUSINESS AND ECONOMY

- The BDA must leverage the momentum in Downtown Bellevue as more businesses and large employers locate offices there
- Although major employers are entering Downtown Bellevue, higher lease rates risk losing existing storefront businesses or attracting new local tenants. This can detract from the area's local flavor and soul. The BDA should work to attract unique, independent businesses that attract foot traffic and create an 18-hour Downtown
- Employment is changing—flexible hours and remote work may translate into more empty offices that could affect the viability of supporting businesses
- New investment and development are focused on the high-end of cost, quality, and experience. There is a need to advocate for and provide varying price points for housing
- Living in Downtown Bellevue is expected to be less affordable





## COMMUNITY & DIVERSITY

- The BDA should acknowledge Downtown Bellevue's diverse population and build programs and culturally-relevant offerings with this in mind
- Downtown can be perceived as lacking a feeling of community. The BDA should increase outreach to the residential community to create connections and support a more cohesive neighborhood
- What community does the BDA serve? Currently, it's the Downtown within the planning boundary, but there are broader topics it should be part of including housing affordability, transportation, parks, and open space, etc.
- The Wilburton neighborhood and Spring District will continue growing and becoming more relevant as multi-faceted centers of mixed-use activity. The BDA could provide event and placemaking support in these areas



## STREET ACTIVATION AND DOWNTOWN SPACES

- Downtown is perceived to have clean streets and sidewalks, however, there are concerns about the decline in cleanliness and public safety either due to growth, changes to policy, or inattention
- The Grand Connection can provide an important connection for Downtown, but there is a lack of leadership in promoting its development as a core Downtown attraction and connection

- The area lacks wayfinding for both vehicles and pedestrians, which is exacerbated by the extensive construction occurring Downtown
- The influx of new employees will require better open space and entertainment options. What keeps someone Downtown after work?
- The BDA can help smaller street front retail through recruitment and provide them with support as they become more established



## TRANSPORTATION

- The BDA should place greater emphasis on pedestrian safety and access
- TransManage is one of the BDA's strengths and can be connected to other programs to achieve sustainability goals
- The block and intersection sizes and street network contribute to a less convenient and hospitable walking environment in certain areas of Downtown. There is a desire to be more balanced to support pedestrians, cyclists, and transit. More mode choices and connections between modes are needed
- Spaces for employee shuttles should be addressed to manage curb space and provide a more layered transportation network

## Where Should The BDA Be in Five Years?

Participants shared their thoughts on the directions that the BDA should pursue to address the opportunities and challenges described above.

- Position the BDA as the entity to lead and facilitate progress on major connectivity projects
- Take the lead on the Grand Connection
- Use arts, culture, and entertainment as a driver for economic growth
- Rethink event structures (catalyst and convener)
- Define Downtown's soul and vibe
- Draw a broader and more diverse workforce to the area at all income levels
- Have one unified, focused, big umbrella vision that also addresses BDA funding
- Connect and activate community spaces
- Align the BDA's value propositions with high-level City developments
- Invest in data and research
- Encourage a stronger commercial and residential balance to create a more active 18-hour district
- Differentiate the BDA's lanes of advocacy from the Bellevue Chamber of Commerce









# 05

## Goals and Strategic Actions

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# Goals and Strategic Actions

(BDA Board adopted September 20, 2022)

## Goal 1: Activate Safe and Attractive Downtown Spaces

The BDA will take a leading role in activating and beautifying public spaces. This focus will drive foot traffic to benefit our economy, add value and enjoyment to the Downtown experience, influence greater connectivity between key attractions, and bring continued attention to public safety and attractiveness of our dynamic environment.

### STRATEGIES

- 1.1 Advance the Grand Connection vision and implementation with strong stakeholder engagement and long-term planning for activation, programming, and maintenance of public spaces in the corridor.
- 1.2 Expand frequent activation of public spaces throughout Downtown, with desired program elements, such as live music and themed events, pop-up markets, art installations, seasonal lighting, etc.
- 1.3 Engage on the City's code and standards to develop and communicate recommendations for increased flexibility for owners/tenants to improve design and activation of publicly accessible spaces.
- 1.4 Partner with the City to develop and implement a Downtown wayfinding plan and program with directional signage to key Downtown attractions.
- 1.5 Work with the BDA's members, the City of Bellevue, Bellevue Police and Bellevue Fire to understand, document and address public safety concerns. This includes regular communication with the Downtown community about how best to create and implement crime prevention solutions.

## Goal 2: Bring the Community Downtown to Celebrate

The BDA will embed principles that foster participation, diversity, equity, and inclusion in its programs, leadership, and events.

### STRATEGIES

- 2.1 Enhance the BDA's existing major community events that provide the strongest financial return, partner value, and community benefit.
- 2.2 Create new partnerships with community organizations, employers, local businesses, and residents to support and promote Downtown as host for a growing number of live cultural events and attractions.
- 2.3 Build the brand of the BDA and Downtown Bellevue.
- 2.4 Partner with the City of Bellevue to evaluate and potentially expand management of programs and activations in the Bellevue Downtown Park.

### **Goal 3: Champion Improvements to Transportation Access, Connectivity, and Choices**

The BDA will advocate for improving access to and through and within Downtown, including a range of multimodal mobility strategies and initiatives.

#### **STRATEGIES**

- 3.1 Be the central voice and forum for strategies and priorities that enhance Downtown's walkability, safety, and multi-modal connections.
- 3.2 Update and support the BDA's Downtown Access Strategy, complementing the annual advocacy agenda for mobility priorities.
- 3.3 Implement tools, such as a dashboard, to measure and communicate Downtown transportation projects and outcomes.
- 3.4 Relaunch the TDM Partnership (transportation demand management, TransManage) with the City of Bellevue, King County, and major employers.
- 3.5 Influence long-term positive outcomes of the Downtown Curb Management plan through coordination with the City, property owners, tenants, and private transit operators.

### **Goal 4: Advocate for Downtown's Economy with Data and Research**

The BDA establishes itself as the primary source of Downtown economic performance data by expanding its capacity to collect, analyze, and report data about key economic sectors and market trends.

#### **STRATEGIES**

- 4.1 Partner with the City of Bellevue, PSRC, and other data resources to create and manage an economic dashboard on the BDA website and social media channels.
- 4.2 Create and report results of a biennial Downtown perception survey.
- 4.3 Issue an annual State of Downtown economic and livability report.

## **Goal 5: Support Downtown’s Storefront and Retail Economy**

The BDA will support street-level businesses with storytelling, new marketing opportunities, and advocacy to reduce regulatory burdens.

### **STRATEGIES**

- 5.1 Highlight local brick-and-mortar street-level businesses in media campaigns and the BDA’s ongoing communications channels.
- 5.2 Partner with the City of Bellevue, Visit Bellevue, and the Bellevue Chamber to promote business assistance programs and support recruitment and retention of Downtown businesses.
- 5.3 Advocate for code changes that eliminate barriers to new businesses and street-level tenants locating Downtown, including those providing services for residents and businesses.
- 5.4 Partner with distinct Downtown neighborhoods and the City of Bellevue to co-fund a part-time district coordinator or event manager.
- 5.5 Collaborate with building owners/managers and/or major tenants to fill vacant ground floor retail units with temporary retail popups or other desired attractions.

## **Goal 6: Strengthen the BDA to Take on New Initiatives**

The BDA develops new funding sources to allow the organization to scale with Downtown’s growth, take advantage of emerging opportunities for community investment, address new challenges, and respond effectively to member and stakeholder priorities.

### **STRATEGIES**

- 6.1 Reinforce the BDA as the convening leadership organization for Downtown promotion, programming and major initiatives, as well as an action-oriented forum for members, stakeholders, businesses, and resident interests.
- 6.2 Establish a new multi-year year renewable funding mechanism for the BDA’s placemaking, public realm management, marketing, TDM and research initiatives.
- 6.3 Establish annual advocacy agendas with the Bellevue Chamber, Visit Bellevue, and other organizations as appropriate to clarify roles and responsibilities.
- 6.4 Develop a diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) framework for the BDA that addresses hiring, leadership, board representation, programming, and advocacy.
- 6.5 Continue to serve member needs and provide information, programs, and services that aid in their success Downtown.





THE BELLEVUE COLLECTION  
BELLEVUE FAMILY 4th

NO TENTS OR CHAIRS  
WITH CANOLES OR SIGNS





Bellevue  
Downtown  
Association

