



Bellevue Planning Commission

September 13, 2023

PLANNING COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM

SUBJECT

Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update: Overview of Policy Changes in the Utilities, Environment, Parks, Recreation & Open Space, and Capital Facilities elements

STAFF CONTACTS

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POLICY ISSUES

The City is currently updating the Comprehensive Plan in accordance with the schedule set forth by the State (RCW 36.70A.130(5)). The update was launched February 28, 2022, and was followed by extensive public engagement (the latest summary of engagement was presented to Planning Commission on April 26, 2023). Updates to policies are largely based on feedback from the community along with the state and regional requirements and the recommendations in study documents such as the Racially Disparate Impact Analysis and the Economic Analysis. This memo focuses on key policy changes within the following elements:

- Utilities
- Environment
- Parks, Recreation & Open Space
- Capital Facilities

DIRECTION NEEDED FROM THE PLANNING COMMISSION

ACTION



DIRECTION



INFORMATION ONLY



BACKGROUND

The major changes to Bellevue's Comprehensive Plan stem from three sources: 1) changes required by state law or to maintain consistency with King County's Countywide Planning Policies (CPPs) and the Puget Sound Regional Council's (PSRC's) Regional Growth Strategy (Vision 2050); 2) changes recommended by study documents that focus on a specific topic or policy area in the plan; and 3) changes derived from community input.

The Comprehensive Plan must follow the state’s Growth Management Act (GMA) and be consistent with PSRC’s Vision 2050 Multi-County Planning Policies (MPPs) and CPPs. Both the MPPs and the CPPs were updated in preparation for Puget Sound-area cities’ updates to their comprehensive plans. They provide direction to the scope of policy changes needed in the Comprehensive Plan. In addition, the GMA has recently been amended leading to additional required changes relating to housing typologies and approaches to address the housing crisis.

Bellevue has commissioned several study documents to assist with informing policy changes for the Comprehensive Plan and related projects. These study documents include:

- Racially Disparate Impact Analysis
- Climate Vulnerability Report
- Air Quality Report
- Economic Impact Report
- Technical Memoranda to support the update of the Watershed Management Plan

Bellevue has engaged with the community since the launch in 2022 through a variety of means including surveys, open houses, focus groups and presentations. The Planning Commission has been kept informed of the results of the engagement as each phase came to a close.

Summaries of each phase can be found at the links below and on [EngagingBellevue.com](https://www.bellevue.gov/engaging-bellevue).

- July 14, 2022 (Summary of Engagement during Phase 1, especially the Vision Survey – [Phase 1 Summary](#))
- September 28, 2022 (Brief summary of Engagement during Phase 2a – [Phase 2a Summary](#))
- February 22 (Summary of engagement with specific groups)
- April 26 (Summary of engagement during Phase 2b – [Phase 2b Summary](#); [Statistically Valid Survey results](#))

The purpose of this memo is to identify key policy areas to focus on in future community engagement. Recognizing that there has been extensive engagement with the community over the course of the project and the timeframe for Planning Commission’s review and recommendation, staff want to direct the community’s engagement to the areas where they can have the most impact and have also not provided input as yet. In addition, if there are key policy areas that Planning Commission would benefit from a more detailed summary to inform their recommendations on policy changes, staff would like to identify that now so it can be included in the schedule.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

There are two additional bodies of information that the Planning Commission will want to consult as they deliberate on the policy changes. The first body of information is the information in the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), comprised of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) and the forthcoming Final Environmental Impact

Statement (FEIS). The DEIS details the potential environmental impacts of a buildout scenario for 4 different possible future land use maps and policies. In addition, it identifies possible actions the city can take to reduce those impacts. The FEIS will add information that comes from the study of a fifth buildout scenario for a future land use map and policies. The FEIS will include additional study of the impact of the development on the tree canopy and the impact of using a mandatory and/or voluntary affordable housing program on the production of affordable housing.

The second body of information includes additional feedback from the community. The city has engaged extensively with the community about the vision, growth scenarios and policy directions. In this next phase, engagement will be more focused on specific toggles where additional discussion is needed to come to an informed decision on policy and land use map changes.

KEY POLICY UPDATES

The key policy areas are groups of policies where needed changes have been identified through a combination of state and regional requirements, recommendations from study documents and community input. Future policy changes may also be informed by the City's growth strategy and supported by technical information contained in the FEIS. The general direction of those changes is described below along with the rationale for the changes.

The Planning Commission will have the opportunity to review the key policy areas in elements grouped by topic. The schedule for considering the key policy updates in the elements is outlined below.

- **September 13:** Utilities, Environment, Parks, Recreation & Open Space, and Capital Facilities elements
- **September 27:** Engagement, Economic Development, Urban Design & the Arts, and Transportation elements
- **October 11:** Land Use and Neighborhoods elements
- **October 25:** Housing and Human Services elements

The key policy update areas in the Utilities, Environment, Parks, Recreation & Open Space, and Capital Facilities elements include:

- Stormwater management and low impact development (LID)
- Climate change
- Urban forestry
- Inclusivity in recreation spaces

Stormwater management and low impact development (LID). Stormwater management is the set of practices that manage surface water to minimize flooding and improve water quality. LID is one set of techniques to manage surface water at a site level. LID is the set of construction

techniques to reduce the impacts of flooding and improve water quality using methods like rain gardens, paving that allows water to seep through it, green roofs, and rainwater catchment and reuse systems.

The Stormwater and Surface Water Policy Review and Recommendations Technical Memorandum (prepared May 27, 2022 to support the Stormwater Plan update) recommended updating the policies to support the latest technology and practices in stormwater management. The Stormwater and Surface Water Policy Review and Recommendations Technical Memorandum and the Climate Vulnerability Report (publication forthcoming) both recommend increased support for LID. LID is not addressed in the EIS because the site-specific water management activities are not part of the scope of this programmatic-level evaluation.

The city has engaged the community about stormwater management through a survey implemented by the Utilities Department as well as an open house and targeted outreach to under-represented groups in July through September 2021. The key take-away from the engagement is that Bellevue residents value the city's streams, lakes and wetlands primarily for the role they play in a healthy ecosystem over their use for recreational purposes or connection to history or spiritual practices.¹ In addition, the engagement around the Comprehensive Plan has shown consistent support for measures that maintain Bellevue's park-like setting and enhance the environment. In the Vision Survey (Phase 1) 65 percent of Bellevue community members said parks and green space were one of the things that they value and want future generations to enjoy, the most common response.

The current Comprehensive Plan has policies that support stormwater management, but they are somewhat outdated and there is minimal support for LID. The key policy changes are to update the policies to direct the city to use the current best practices and latest technology, and to include LID as a preferred or required practice. The primary impacted elements are Utilities and Environment. Other policy changes include stronger policy support for the City's recent Watershed Management Plan.

Climate change. Addressing the causes and repercussions of climate change includes activities that range from the siting of buildings, to vehicle, building and production emissions, to enhancing green infrastructure. The state legislature passed HB 1181 "Improving the state's response to climate change by updating the state's planning framework" in 2023. The actions in this bill are not required to be implemented until 2025. The city is making required changes that are easy to implement in this update. In addition, both the MPPs and CPPs include policies to consider climate change in activities across policy areas. The Climate Vulnerability Assessment recommended making changes to policies to increase the resiliency of city systems

¹ "Watershed Management Plan Community Engagement Summary, Phase 1", January 2022.

to withstand extreme weather and natural disasters as well as to reduce the negative impacts on the environment stemming from human settlements.

The current Comprehensive Plan includes support for environmental preservation and enhancement, however the causes and impacts of climate change are not specifically addressed. The key policy changes would update policies to:

- 1) Direct the city to implement standards, goals and benchmarks to reduce the city's impact on the environment and provide support for the Environmental Stewardship Initiative,
- 2) Plan for resiliency in city systems such as the city's utilities and transportation networks, to withstand extreme weather and natural disasters,
- 3) Implement strategies to adapt to climate change.

These changes will include policies in nearly all elements however, the primary elements impacted are Capital Facilities, Utilities, and Environment.

Urban forestry. Urban forestry is the practice of stewarding trees growing on both public and private land in the city. The DEIS included a memorandum on the impact on plants and animals (Appendix E). The memorandum highlights Bellevue's recent gain in tree canopy to 39 percent canopy. It also highlights several measures Bellevue could take to support the continued growth of the tree canopy. These measures are,

- 1) Incentives for developers to add trees to their development in areas with little or no tree canopy (such as Downtown, BelRed or the Wilburton Commercial Area), and
- 2) Incentives or requirements for clustered development in areas with existing tree canopy.

In response to comments on the DEIS and Council direction, the FEIS will include an analysis of the impact of the Preferred Alternative on the tree canopy and may include additional actions the city can take to minimize the negative impacts. Community members are quite vocal about the need for maintaining and enhancing the tree canopy. In the Statistically Valid Survey ([Phase 2b](#)), respondents ranked "Preserve and enhance the tree canopy" as their second overall priority. Regardless of the demographic characteristics of the respondent, this priority was consistently in the top 5 priorities.

The current Comprehensive Plan includes support for urban forestry and the tree canopy. An update to the tree code is currently underway. The key policy changes are to add more support for the enhancement of the tree canopy and opportunities to restore ecological health where needed in forested areas of the city. The primary impacted elements are Parks, Recreation & Open Space and Environment.

Inclusive recreation spaces. Inclusive recreation spaces include playgrounds, trails, parks, community buildings and other recreationally focused areas that are accessible to people of many different abilities and backgrounds. Both the MPPs and the CPPs have policies to develop parks to prioritize underserved groups (MPP-En-15; CPP-H-24 & CPP-EN-22). For parks and recreation this includes developing recreational opportunities that serve people with a wide variety of mobility and cognitive abilities. The DEIS did not address this as it is not within the scope of an environmental impact statement and the FEIS will likely not contain any information related to these policies. The city has not engaged with the community about accessibility of parks and recreation within the city however, in the Vision Survey (Phase 1), the community rated the city relatively lowly on the City goal to be an equitable community. Only 49 percent of community members agreed that Bellevue is an equitable community where everyone has an opportunity to thrive. While this is not specific to park accessibility, it is clear that the community sees there is room for improvement in making many aspects of the city more equitable.

The current Comprehensive Plan supports equitable access to parks. The key policy changes are to more explicitly state that access should include people of different abilities and to prioritize access for historically underserved populations. The primary element impacted is Parks, Recreation & Open Space.

ATTACHMENTS

A. N/A