

MEMORANDUM



Bellevue Parks & Community Services

Date: June 20, 2024

To: Lynne Robinson, Mayor
Mo Malakoutian, Deputy Mayor
Dave Hamilton, Parks & Community Services Board Liaison
City Councilmembers

From: Paul Clark, Chair
Bellevue Parks & Community Services Board

Subject: 2025-2034 Parks Capital Investment Program Recommendations

Thank you for the opportunity to advise the City Council on the Parks & Community Services 2025-2034 Capital Investment Program (CIP) Plan. We hope that these comments are helpful as the Council prioritizes the City's capital investment needs for the next ten years.

Council Vision, Strategic Target Areas and Priorities

At the April, May and June board meetings, the Board reviewed the budget process and the proposed parks capital investments in relation to the Council's Strategic Target Areas (STA) and 2024-2026 Priorities. The parks projects proposed in the current budget provide a high return on investment by aligning with multiple target areas, including:

- High Quality Built and Natural Environment,
- Community Safety and Health,
- Vibrant Economy, and
- Thriving People and Communities.

Per the Council Vision objectives, "we work to create iconic destinations and vibrant spaces for everyone to enjoy." Park capital projects have been, and continue to be, at the forefront of advancing this vision through Council priority projects such as the new Aquatic Center, Meydenbauer Bay Park, Ashwood Park, Downtown Park NE Corner, and Grand Connection implementation. In addition to these, the parks system will help advance several of the 2024-26 Priorities. Trail projects will be advanced that develop Eastrail regional trail connections for residents and workers. At the system level, parks and trails should factor thematically into the city's effort to update its brand identity and community centers and park facilities serve as places to enhance community engagement strategies.

Parks & Open Space System Plan Goals and Funding Strategy

Overall, the Board considered a variety of factors in developing these recommendations, drawing from community needs expressed in the Council-adopted 2022 Parks & Open Space System Plan and recent planning initiatives and policy direction from the Comprehensive Plan update. At the root are recommended funding for multiple previously funded project commitments from the 2008 and 2022 Parks Levies, including ongoing foundational support for

Parks & Open Space Acquisition and the *Parks Renovation and Refurbishment Plan*. When surveyed, Bellevue residents consistently say that they want to continue expanding the park and trail system through property acquisition and the development of existing parks. They also consistently praise and value the high level of maintenance provided at existing parks. Keeping existing facilities open, safe and welcoming with regular maintenance and renovation is a cost-effective way to maintain park accessibility for the community.

Our Focus: Increasing Access

Springing from that foundation, proposed and recommended projects for this budget cycle are centered around the concept of “increasing access.” They are responsive to the community’s interest in equitably expanding the park and trail system; improving universal access to existing parks; increased access to parks and recreation resources in growing urban neighborhoods; increased connection and access to waterfront, beaches and pools; and new access to emerging sports and recreation.

Access to Parks and Trails for Underserved Areas

Both the Parks & Open Space System Plan and Environmental Stewardship Initiative acknowledge that access to existing parks is not equal across all neighborhoods. With a goal of bringing a park or trail to within 1/3-mile of every Bellevue resident, the current budget included funding for *Eastgate* and *Factoria Neighborhood Park* development. These projects in underserved neighborhoods carry forward into the next budget, along with additional funding recommended for *Park Trail System Access and Expansion*. Park trails are used by 80% of Bellevue residents and adding trail connections is an efficient and effective way to increase park access to more underserved neighborhoods. Examples of planned projects include an Eastrail trail connection in Woodridge and trails within the recently acquired Woodlawn Park open space in Newport Hills.

Access to Existing Parks for Users of All Abilities

Additionally, two recommended projects focus on expanding universal access at existing parks. Targeted funds through the *ADA Accessibility Barrier Removal Initiative* will accelerate the pace of projects that increase access to existing park facilities for all users of all abilities. A new project, *Kelsey Creek Farm Energy and Accessibility Renovation*, has twin goals to modernize the Twin Valley Barns and other features at the popular park to lower energy use and increase physical accessibility, while retaining the historic character at this beloved park.

Access to Greenspace and Recreation Opportunities for Urban Residents

An evident goal of the Council is the planning and development of high-quality, livable urban neighborhoods. It is imperative that these neighborhoods include parks and recreation opportunities to create places where families and businesses can flourish. Well-maintained parks contribute positively to the overall economic development of the City, including raising property values, attracting and retaining key businesses, promoting tourism, and protecting water and air quality.

To support this outcome in Downtown Bellevue, continued funding is recommended for *Ashwood Park Design and Development* and a new project is recommended to support underserved residents by developing a new *Downtown SE Neighborhood Park* on land that was previously acquired for this purpose.

For new urban neighborhoods in BelRed and Wilburton, much work is needed in property acquisitions and park development to achieve city goals and ensure that new residents do not live in park deserts. To further this work, continued funding is recommended for *BelRed Parks and Streams* and a new project, *Wilburton Parks and Trails*, is recommended for the Wilburton Commercial Area. These two projects will provide walkable access to new parks where none exist today.

Access to Water

Second to our trails, community beach and waterfront parks are the highest used facilities and hold the second highest priority for Bellevue residents for additional park development. Of the 14 miles of lakefront shoreline within city limits, the public has access to approximately 12% of that shoreline in the form of public beach parks and boat launches on Lake Washington. The city has no public access to Lake Sammamish. To advance these needs, budget proposals continue the city's investment in the *Meydenbauer Bay Park Design and Development (Phase 2)*, *Lake Sammamish Neighborhood Beach Park*, and an ongoing program for *Park Shoreline Restoration* at existing older beach parks.

In addition, Bellevue's one public pool is nearing the end of its useful life despite the growing number of children and adults in our city that need swimming lessons for basic public safety. In 2003, the Board recommended to site a new Aquatic Center at Bellevue Airfield Park. The Council agreed and directed an updated master plan for the park to advance through environmental review. Two recommended capital projects, *Bellevue Aquatic Facility Design and Development* and *Bellevue Airfield Park Development* are positioned to advance this priority project.

Access to Emerging Sports and Recreation

The 2022 Parks Levy includes needed funding to allow our existing parks and park facilities to respond to contemporary and culturally specific recreation trends through *Off-Leash Areas and Emerging Sports Facilities*. Continuing the funding for this project is recommended along with funding for *Bellevue Airfield Park Development*, which will provide pickleball and other new recreation facilities for our growing community.

We appreciate the ability to provide comments on the 2025-2034 Parks CIP Plan and look forward to continuing to engage as the budget process moves forward. Feel free to contact any of the Parks & Community Services Board members if you have questions or comments.
