

**DATE:** June 5, 2025

**TO:** Environmental Services Commission

**FROM:** Eric LaFrance, Engineering Planning Manager  
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**SUBJECT:** Watershed Management Planning Update

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## **ACTION REQUIRED**

This is an informational briefing, and there is no action required.

## **BACKGROUND / ANALYSIS**

Managing Bellevue's watersheds is foundational to meeting the goal of maintaining and improving our built and natural environment. This briefing will touch on a number of work areas that help Utilities meet our environmental goals. The four work areas that will be covered in this briefing are: Watershed Management Planning, Surface and Storm Water System Planning, Environmental Monitoring, and the federal Community Rating System Program.

### **Watershed Management Planning**

The Watershed Management Plan will be the written culmination of years of effort in the following efforts:

- Open Streams Condition Assessment
- Watershed Assessment Reports
- Watershed Prioritization and Improvement Toolkit
- Watershed Improvement Strategies
- Public Engagement Strategies

The last ESC briefing in September 2023 covered the last two bullets of Watershed Improvement Strategies, and public engagement. Since that briefing staff and leadership have been working on developing policies that will help guide our future programs and capital projects. Ultimately, it was decided that the Watershed Management Plan is not the ideal forum to finalize policies because it only considers watershed priorities. The Stormwater utility has to consider all of the demands placed on it to properly identify and recommend policies. Therefore, policy work will be finalized as part of the Surface and Storm Water System Plan. This plan is all encompassing and will present the full picture of what will be required to operate our stormwater program. The remaining work of producing the draft Watershed Management Plan is ongoing and staff will be working with consultants and leadership to produce this document for your review later in 2025.

### **Surface and Storm Water System Plan**

The update to the Surface and Storm Water System Plan is just getting started. The ESC briefing on system planning in late 2024 covered what is involved with system planning in general. Specifics for stormwater

planning will be presented to ESC in the fall of 2025. Current tasks include developing the public outreach approach and data gathering. Development and production of this plan will continue through 2026.

### **Environmental Monitoring Program**

As part of the City's commitment to a High Quality Built and Natural Environment (Strategic Target Area 4), the Environmental Monitoring Program (EMP) is a science-based and systematic approach to assessing the health of Bellevue's streams. Our streams are natural features that are ecologically and culturally valuable, and they are critical components of the City's stormwater drainage system. Just as we monitor and maintain drinking water or wastewater systems, our streams require ongoing assessment to ensure they continue to function as healthy, resilient systems amidst the pressures of urban development and climate variability.

The effects of urbanization on aquatic ecosystems includes flashy streamflow and pollutant loading from stormwater runoff and a decrease in habitat quality from channel alteration and loss of riparian vegetation. The goal of the Environmental Monitoring Program is to measure and interpret stream health by specifically evaluating stream functions that are impacted by urbanization. In partnership with King County and supported by consultants, we conduct long-term monitoring of six key indicators: streamflow, water quality, physical habitat, benthic macroinvertebrates, resident fish, and spawning salmon. These data are being integrated into a data management system for efficient and consistent long-term trend analysis to support decision making and planning efforts.

Data collected through the Environmental Monitoring Program will be used for performance evaluation and adaptive management of the Watershed Management Plan to ensure Bellevue's investments are achieving intended environmental outcomes. The EMP also supports the Environmental Stewardship Initiative by providing a stream health performance metric using our benthic macroinvertebrate data. Furthermore, the EMP enables data-driven decisions about capital investments projects, operations and maintenance practices, and long-term planning—reinforcing Bellevue's core values of stewardship, innovation, and exceptional public service.

### **Bellevue's Community Rating System Program**

The City of Bellevue participates in FEMA's National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP), which aims to reduce the impact of flooding on public and private properties. The program provides affordable flood insurance to property owners and encourages communities to adopt and enforce floodplain management regulations in flood hazard areas. To be able to participate in the NFIP, the City of Bellevue adopts and enforces an ordinance that requires new buildings to be protected from damage by a 100-year flood.

The Community Rating System (CRS) is a program developed by FEMA, for communities that go above and beyond the minimum requirements needed for NFIP participation. As part of the CRS program, a community can receive credits for implementing activities that promote better floodplain management. Depending on the number of credits received through this program, a community may be able to obtain a reduction in flood insurance premium for its members.

City of Bellevue participates in the CRS program, and has a CRS classification of 5, which qualifies for a 25 percent reduction in flood insurance premium for City residents. To be able to receive credits through the program, the City must perform certain creditable activities every year, such as:

- Maintaining Elevation and Floodproofing Certificates for construction within Special Flood Hazard Areas (the City's Land Use Code prohibits most development within floodplains)
- Conducting outreach projects, and providing flood information and advice to inquirers
- Enforcing the administration of floodplain management regulations and stormwater code
- Updating and maintaining Flood Insurance Rate Maps and Flood Insurance Studies

- Implementing the drainage system maintenance program

These activities are reviewed by a CRS specialist, during a verification visit that occurs every 5 years. The City also goes through a recertification process (which includes providing progress reports on activities) every year, to show that it is continuing to perform the activities for which it is receiving CRS credit.

### **POLICY ISSUES**

This briefing does not address any specific policies, rather it is an overview of the work that is being conducted under existing policies and funded priorities.

### **FISCAL IMPACT**

This is an update of current activities and there are no fiscal policies to consider at this time.

### **ATTACHMENTS & AVAILABLE DOCUMENTS**

No attachments