

CITY COUNCIL AGENDA TOPIC

Proposed Japanese American Legacy Project and partnership with Isan Bellevue

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**INFORMATION
ONLY**

Staff will present the city's partnership with the organization Isan Bellevue to develop a commemoration project in the new park at Main Street and 112th Avenue SE. Isan Bellevue will raise funding for design and construction of the project, which will honor Bellevue's Japanese American heritage.

RECOMMENDATION

N/A

BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS

Isan Bellevue is a community-based organization whose mission is to commemorate Japanese American heritage in Bellevue. Isan Bellevue has worked with staff to identify sites for a Legacy Project that honors the contributions of Japanese Americans in Bellevue and builds understanding of the impact of World War II incarceration on the city's Japanese American community.

The organization formed a Site Committee in 2018 to identify potential commemoration sites in Bellevue, with the goal of identifying a primary site and satellite sites. The city's Arts Program and Parks & Community Services Department participated in the committee's work. After applying selection criteria to sites across Bellevue, the committee identified five potential locations for the primary project in 2019. One of the locations was the park constructed by Sound Transit at Main Street and 112th Avenue SE (Attachment A).

The city's 2023–24 mid-biennium budget update allocated \$250,000 to Parks & Community Services (CIP Plan No. P-AD-115) to support planning and conceptual design, confirm site feasibility, and develop a proposal that Isan Bellevue could use for private fundraising. In 2024, Sound Transit transferred the completed park at 112th and Main Street to the city. That same year, the first stage of planning and conceptual design confirmed the new park as a feasible location for the primary project.

Concept Plan

A final concept design was identified in December 2025 by Isan Bellevue in collaboration with city staff (Attachment B). The concept includes a plaza designed as a large-scale inlay map of Bellevue's historical Japanese American farms, as well as opportunities for a heritage display that may feature artwork and a unique site-specific shelter structure. The project is designed to inspire education and reflection, while preserving the pathways, open space, and gathering areas that currently exist in the park.

A planning-level cost estimate for the project was developed in conjunction with the conceptual design, to inform project planning and fundraising goals. Design costs are estimated at \$350,000, and construction costs are estimated to be approximately \$3.5M in 2026 dollars.

Fundraising Partnership

Isan Bellevue's goal is to raise all funding for design and construction of the Legacy Project. Staff have prepared a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to define the implementation process for the project and the roles and responsibilities of each entity.

The MOU outlines the key points of the partnership, notably:

1. The city would contribute land, project management, and ongoing maintenance of the project;
2. Isan Bellevue commits to raising \$350,000 for design costs and \$3.5M for construction costs;
3. Fundraising goals are established in three phases, with the understanding that design and construction would not begin until funding is secured.

The project timeline depends largely on the success of the fundraising campaign, which may take up to five years. If the MOU is approved, Isan Bellevue will launch the fundraising campaign. The city will complete design phases and conduct public engagement for the project as fundraising milestones are achieved.

This proposed MOU is similar to the successful partnership between the city and the Bellevue Rotary Club that created Inspiration Playground in Downtown Park in 2017.

Park Naming Process

Concurrent with work on the Legacy Project, Parks & Community Services initiated public outreach to identify a name for the new park. A Council study session presentation on March 4, 2025, provided an overview of the park naming process and indicated that staff were collaborating with a local community group to explore a possible Japanese American commemoration at the park. Council directed staff to proceed with the public naming process and expressed support for honoring Japanese American heritage at the park.

Staff have completed the first round of public engagement to identify a park name, which has resulted in a short list of potential names suggested by community members. The list of names will be reviewed by the Parks & Community Services Board, who will recommend a name to Council later this year.

POLICY & FISCAL IMPACTS

Policy Impact

Comprehensive Plan: Parks, Recreation & Open Space and Urban Design & the Arts Elements

- PA-10. Develop partnerships with other public agencies, non-profits and the private sector to provide and fund parks, open space, and cultural and recreation facilities in the city.
- PA-24. Use parks to celebrate, acknowledge and preserve the full local history, including that of native populations through park design, signage, programming and cultural landscape conservation.
- UD-6. Encourage the creation and preservation of iconic visual reference points and gateway elements in the community through innovative site and building designs.

- UD-61. Recognize and affirm diverse heritages within the community through interpretative materials, artistic expression and placemaking.

The Japanese American Legacy Project addresses key strategic target areas of Council’s adopted vision, including a high-quality built and natural environment and thriving people and communities.

Fiscal Impact

There are no fiscal impacts associated with finalizing an MOU to support the city’s partnership with Isan Bellevue. Funding from the 2023–2024 biennial budget was used to determine site feasibility and develop a concept design, and Isan Bellevue has committed to raising all funds for design and construction of the project.

OPTIONS

N/A

ATTACHMENTS

- A. Vicinity Map
- B. Recommended Concept Plan

AVAILABLE IN COUNCIL LIBRARY

Draft Memorandum of Understanding