



# Bellevue Planning Commission

July 7, 2021

## PLANNING COMMISSION STUDY SESSION ITEM

### SUBJECT

Final Review on the Northeast Bellevue Neighborhood Area Plan: Study Session #3.

### STAFF CONTACTS

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### POLICY ISSUES

Neighborhood Area Plans bring the City's broader vision to life in a local way. The policies found within these plans provide guidance to City staff and consultants, those working on projects in the community, and others helping to shape our neighborhoods' futures. These broad plans provide a framework for future work in the neighborhoods.

### DIRECTION NEEDED FROM THE PLANNING COMMISSION

#### ACTION



#### DIRECTION



#### INFORMATION ONLY



This plan is part of the annual Comprehensive Plan Amendment (CPA) process. Tonight's focus is a continued discussion of policies found within the Northeast Bellevue Neighborhood Area Plan highlighting specific polices addressing key neighborhood issues. Staff is not seeking direction on the plan tonight due to the upcoming public hearing scheduled for July 14<sup>th</sup>. (Material for the public hearing, including the [staff report](#) were sent to the Commission on June 29.) Tonight's special meeting has been scheduled to allow the Commission additional time to discuss the policies with the staff report in hand. We will look at how the new policies address significantly changed conditions reflecting key neighborhood issues, how the policies have evolved during the engagement process, and how the plan fits within larger citywide planning efforts.

### BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS

The Community Development Department is leading the Great Neighborhoods effort with the goal of updating all Neighborhood Area Plans over the coming years. The most recent major update to the Northeast Bellevue subarea plan occurred in 1985. Many conditions have changed significantly since that time. Updated goals, policies, and neighborhood priorities in the proposed plan aim to address these changed conditions and provide clear high level policy guidance for future neighborhood efforts.

### Previous Planning Commission Review

During the Planning Commission meeting on June 9, concerns raised by Northeast Bellevue residents providing public comment centered on preserving open space and tree canopy, implementing new housing types in ways that both blend in with the existing residential character of the neighborhood and are climate ready, and addressing the impacts of adjacent growth on traffic with a focus on making roadways safer for

walking and biking. Commissioners expressed interest in pulling out those policies where there may be lack of agreement. The following sections highlight draft policies that focus on these issues and provide discussion of how these policies developed during the engagement process.

### Sense of Place

Residents generally support the policies in this section. Public comments have helped shape and strengthen them throughout the process. The following policies are of particular interest in continued discussions and comments.

*S-NE-3. Encourage a graceful transition between the neighborhood scale of Northeast Bellevue and the scale of higher intensity uses in surrounding neighborhoods.*

*S-NE-6. Multifamily development is not allowed within Northeast Bellevue Districts 1 and 2. Existing multifamily uses within District 1 can be converted to senior citizen housing, senior congregate care housing, assisted living and nursing homes.*

*S-NE-7. Retail uses are not allowed in Northeast Bellevue District 1*

*S-NE-8. Office use is appropriate for Northeast Bellevue District 2.*

During the engagement process, residents continually emphasized that a key mechanism for achieving a graceful transition and maintaining a buffer from higher intensity uses was preserving the open space and stand of trees that are part of the Bellevue Technology Center site (shown as District 2 in the land use map). They expressed interest in retaining policies from the previous plan that explicitly designate office as the appropriate use of that site and that limit retail uses in District 1 and multifamily uses in both Districts 1 and 2. Three policies from the previous plan were incorporated into the new plan. Additionally, under the environment section, a policy was written to prioritize park and open space acquisitions in areas adjacent to high density neighborhoods and where stands of significant trees perform important ecological functions.

### Sense of Community

Northeast Bellevue residents have expressed support for these policies. A desire for a greater sense of community and connection was a theme heard throughout the engagement process. Public comments have not highlighted any specific concerns regarding these policies.

### Housing

Northeast Bellevue residents generally support these policies, yet many have expressed concerns over how new housing typologies would be implemented through regulation. Also, important to note, is that there has been confusion about the meaning of the words “affordable housing.” Many residents interpret affordable housing strictly to mean housing affordable to households earning 80 percent of area median income or less. Introducing a mix of housing typologies would provide housing options affordable at a variety of price levels rather than only at the lower income levels.

*S-NE-19. Explore introducing a mix of new housing typologies such as detached accessory dwelling units, duplexes and triplexes to allow options for a range of households.*

*S-NE-20. Ensure new housing typologies in single-family areas maintain adequate separation from adjacent properties to reduce potential impacts to neighbors.*

*S-NE-21. Ensure adequate infrastructure exists for new housing typologies (e.g. transportation, utilities, schools and parks).*

*S-NE-22. Minimize impacts from any new housing typology to the environment and to the existing residential character of the street experience.*

*S-NE-23. Build awareness of programs that support and enable older adults to stay in their home as they age.*

Residents recognize how housing has become increasingly expensive in Northeast Bellevue over the past decades and are particularly concerned with how this impacts older residents who end up paying higher property taxes as their property values rise. Policy S-NE-23 speaks to helping older adults age in place by building awareness of existing programs. Currently, both the state and city have programs to help reduce housing costs for older adults such as the state's property tax exemption and deferral programs for senior citizens and the city's home repair assistance and utility rate and tax relief and programs. Building awareness of these programs and future ones that may arise will be important for Bellevue's aging population.

Residents have also expressed concern over the positive feedback loop that ensues when land becomes more valuable, forcing redevelopment into ever larger and more expensive homes. Residents recognize that redevelopment of modest homes into larger ones leads to greater exclusivity forcing first time home buyers to look elsewhere for housing. When discussing housing challenges during the engagement process, residents suggested allowing a greater variety of housing types including creatively designed duplexes and triplexes that look like single family homes and accessory dwelling units that allow for multi-generational living. Policy S-NE-19 calls upon the city to explore introducing a mix of housing typologies.

The challenge is finding an elegant mix of regulation that preserves the neighborhood's natural assets and sense of place while allowing innovative approaches to address the changing housing market and preserve access to a range of households. Policies S-NE-20-22 provide high level guidance for introducing new housing typologies into the neighborhood. They call for preserving qualities that residents value including adequate separation, necessary infrastructure and protections for the environment as well as neighborhood character.

How these housing policies get implemented is extremely important to residents and will require a comprehensive and strategic approach along with robust community engagement. The policies in this section reflect the neighborhood's desire to address this challenge while ensuring new typologies preserve the neighborhood's sense of place. Future analyses and discussions on citywide housing needs and housing regulations will help identify and refine innovative and elegant solutions.

### *Mobility and Access*

Northeast Bellevue residents have expressed support for these policies, yet they have called for more timely investment in improvements especially as development in surrounding areas occurs. The goals below represent the breadth of topics covered within this section, while S-NE-40 represents a new policy that specifically addresses increased adjacent activity within Redmond.

**To have zero traffic deaths and serious injuries on Northeast Bellevue streets.**

**To reduce congestion by expanding transportation choices making it safe, comfortable, and convenient to walk, bike, roll and/or take public transportation.**

## **To expand convenient access to employment, goods and services.**

*S-NE-40. Review private sector development projects in Redmond and recommend mitigation for transportation system impacts that may occur in Bellevue.*

Significant changes to mobility and access have been witnessed by Northeast Bellevue residents over the decades as surrounding job centers have grown without commensurate housing nearby. This has resulted in increased traffic volumes along major arterials through Northeast Bellevue as workers commute from housing located outside of these centers and the city itself. While many residents would like to use alternative modes of travel, increased volumes, along with increased speeds on Northup Way and other arterials, have made non-motorized modes of travel more dangerous.

The updated plan has three separate goals to address these issues. As shown above, the first goal is to have zero traffic deaths and serious injuries, the second goal is to expand travel mode choices by making them safer, more comfortable and convenient to use. The third goal is to expand convenient access to jobs, goods and services. Each goal has three to four policies calling for improved and expanded transportation facilities to address mobility and access challenges under these new conditions.

Responding to resident concerns about impacts from development occurring with the City of Redmond, a policy was added calling for review of projects in Redmond and recommendations for mitigation for impacts that may occur within Bellevue. The plan sets the framework for future transportation investment decisions by identifying key mobility and access challenges, opportunities and priorities for the neighborhood.

### Environment

Northeast Bellevue residents have expressed support for these policies, yet faster implementation has been called for especially as redevelopment within the neighborhood occurs.

## **To preserve and enhance the tree canopy in Northeast Bellevue.**

*S-NE-41. Support efforts to both protect Northeast Bellevue's tree canopy and enhance the health of trees on both public and private property.*

*S-NE-42. Support citywide efforts to introduce or amend requirements for tree preservation to support the City's tree canopy goal.*

Escalating land values have increased pressures for redevelopment of small modest homes into larger homes with larger footprints resulting in loss of tree canopy. Recognizing the value of the tree canopy in their neighborhood, many long-time Northeast Bellevue residents want the city to respond to the rapid pace of redevelopment and resulting tree loss by strengthening tree protection regulations. This Plan calls for supporting citywide efforts to introduce new requirements or amend existing ones to support the City's tree canopy goal. Responding to residents' strong desire for tree protection, a new policy was added explicitly calling on the city to both protect Northeast Bellevue's tree canopy and enhance the health of trees on both public and private property. With these policies, the Plan provides strong support for future citywide efforts to implement stronger tree protection regulations.

### **Next Steps**

A public hearing on the draft Plan is scheduled for July 14. The timing of the public hearing will allow for an additional study session in late July if needed, prior to the August break in Commission meetings for further discussion of the draft plan and public testimony if the Commission desires. To move the plan forward as part of the annual CPA process, City Council would need to review it in the Fall and adopt it before the end of the year.

**ATTACHMENTS**

A. Northeast Bellevue Draft Plan with Highlights