

Community Engagement

On Sept 19-24, 2025 Matthew Mazzotta did an On-Site Visit to Bellevue to meet with the community and stakeholders, as well as see the site and discuss the plans for the Crossing with the City, Grand Connection Team, Designers, and the Friends of Grand Connection group. Matthew walked the entire Grand Connection trail from Meydenbauer Bay Park to City Hall Plaza and then took the light rail to Wilburton bike path. He also did an Eastrail Tour with Eastrail Partners to the Google headquarters, rode the light rail to Redmond, and visited other sites on foot like KidsQuest Children's Museum, Bellevue Botanical Garden, and the surrounding neighborhoods around downtown.

After Matthew's site visit in September he did a series of online meetings in October with Parks and environmental stewardship, Utilities, Community Development - Planning division, Cultural and Economic Development division, and Friends of Grand Connection group (focused on the future of Bellevue) .

This community engagement/data collection phase is to identify key themes the art plan can take as their starting points so that the future works reflect critical themes or desires that the community and city would like to address. The community engagement process will generate initial concepts for internal review with the larger Grand Connection team so the plan and future art opportunities integrate well into the overall Grand Connection design plan. Below are Matthews findings both cataloged and Major themes identified from the discussions listed above.

Possible major themes of the Plan and Artworks

From the community engagement three possible themes came to light that could hold many of the sentiments, dreams, and ideas people in Bellevue had for the future artworks and the experience of The Crossing of the Grand Connection.

1) “Repair” - As a Concept

The title itself “The Crossing” implies that this new connective infrastructure project is trying to reconnect something that has been separated. In this case, it is the highway that bisects the east and west sides of the city. This physical separation makes it challenging not only for humans to cross on foot, but also cuts off access for other species that used to traverse this area.

“Repairing” Natural systems — Decades ago, decisions were made about preserving the streams and natural systems in Bellevue. Currently the storm drains lead to the creek and are cleaned in the process. This is an example of how there are invisible systems that we live with everyday. The future artworks of The Crossing might not physically repair the natural systems we live with, however, they could regenerate the sense of connection and foster an understanding of how the natural systems integrate with our infrastructure. An artwork could bring such a system to light and connect people to the streams and wildlife that they may have overlooked. It would be a way of getting people to understand what is under our feet, above our heads, and how we are all interconnected.

“Repairing” the Social — Bellevue can be seen and is often described in utopic terms along with its global tech output, international residents, and unofficial moniker of “Safe and Clean.” Its reputation and aesthetic includes symbols of luxury, status, opulence, and a high quality of life, however not all communities of Bellevue experience the same opportunities or qualities of life. The artplan could expand this theme of “Repair” to address cultural injustice, socioeconomic inequality, the negative impacts of the technology being developed in the “Innovation Triangle” by telling a story about who we are and where we are going, help residents feel that downtown is theirs, reframing past and current cultural presentation, and “Heal the Divide” (however we define it).

“Repairing” the Future — Often, when we think of repair, it is about restoring something back to its original state. However, what happens when we extend this concept of repair into the future? What will need to be repaired that we can or can not predict? Ideas around sustainability, global impact, and climate are predictable areas of repair, such as Bellevue's commitment to be carbon neutral by 2050. However, what will “repair” mean for Bellevue's future in 20, 50, 100, 1000 years?

2) “Refuge” - As a Concept

When we think of a refuge it can bring out ideas of safety, calmness, health, wellness and connection to the natural world. In a city known for its rapid growth and change in both its built

environment and the residents who inhabit it, conceptualizing The Crossing as a refuge can be an act of resistance.

“Aesthetic Refuge” – If we want to imagine a place that is a refuge, it could include protection from the elements and noise, with calming colors, intriguing and pleasant shapes and textures. We could also embed practices the indigenous peoples had for the land. Art is an opportunity to emphasize the importance of the natural world in the face of all this growth.

“Social Refuge” – We know Bellevue as “Safe and Clean,” however, what does it mean to be safe? Can we see the crossing as safe? Currently it is being designed to be safe for transportation on foot or wheels, but is this safe for social life? Will the Crossing be a place where people can feel a sense of community, or that they are represented in the ways they would like? Is this a place that they can connect to and have a sense of ownership? Or a place to show off to friends, family, and the world through images? Is it welcoming and respectful to all, including those who have lived here for generations, new residents, and visitors, and even those that will only see the place online?

“Natural Refuge” – One of the signatures of Bellevue is its integration of the natural world and the built environment. The city’s moniker a City in a Park becomes clear as you drive through the city and surrounding areas while being surrounded by greenery and trees. It is like sliding through a forest and ending up in dense urban pockets. As pleasant as Bellevue can look throughout the year, there are times when the natural world becomes challenging such as the more recent significant climate events like heat waves, storm events, high heat and smoke. Tackling these trends could make The Crossing a location to display climate resilience.

3) “**Tech and Natural World**” - As a Concept

Two of Bellevue's prime identities—technology and the natural world—are on full display in its global output and local landscape. These two distinct categories can be seen to have nothing to do with each other, be opposing forces, or, in the case of Bellevue, work together in harmony. Someone in Bellevue could be developing a new technology for someone on the other side of the planet while looking at a view of Mount Rainier on their lunch break. One area of design that ties technology and the natural world tightly together is Biomimicry—the study of nature's designs, processes, and systems to find sustainable solutions for human problems. Thinking of The Crossing as a crossing of technology and nature, the artplan could lay out guiding principles for future artworks to carry some aspects of Biomimicry, such as exploring experimental designs, exposing the beauty of the natural world, taking contemporary issues as their focus to increase their visibility or solve for, play with scale on this large piece of infrastructure, etc. These artworks would be an opportunity to more seamlessly integrate the growth of technology in our lives with the natural systems we all interconnected.

Appendix - Raw notes from discussions listed under category groupings (Narrative, Criteria of The Crossing, Functional, Possible sites/opportunities for future artwork, Community suggestions, Anecdotal)

Narrative

- Large community parks will be become more community oriented
- The Crossing will facilitate moving around neighborhoods
- Bellevue has few "Points of interest" (art or architecture) and it's desired to have more
- Parks are not a backdrop to city life - they are integral
- Opportunities for respite - (one location Grand Connection and Eastrail intersection)
- Represent local creatives - maybe like London's 4th plinth concept (location to swap out temporary artworks on an ongoing basis) would be in the original plan that can be curated by a friends group
- Take advantage of the fact that the GC is a linear crossing
 - Consider the whole crossing and make it more engaging throughout
- Megaproject for Bellevue
- The Crossing is seen as a "Destination" vs only a connective infrastructure
 - Asset for Bellevue rather than just a function
- Themes or projects that help us remember nature in 20 years (this is a moment to set a course for Bellevue's future)
- In 15 years this will be the heart of the city
- Diversity / international
 - "Bellevue welcomes the world"
- Growth and change been part of the character of Bellevue's history (also creates conflicts)
 - Urbanization of Bellevue - grown over the last decades
- Bellevue is planned to be carbon neutral by 2050
- Legacy of open spaces in Bellevue due to policies put in years ago
 - Can we imagine the park of the 21st century and inspire a way forward!
- Utopia - great community - high quality of life - great parks - very harmonious
 - People - innovative people who work hard to spend time outdoor with their families
 - Innovation (whenever the city has an issue there is always an expert in the community to speak about it)
- The Crossing seen as Safe - engages the families - brings technology into the equation - maybe an app has features on the crossing - interactive technology (augmented reality and VR) - social media selfie - make art that you know exactly know where you are (look at how beautiful it is from this site like mountain)
- The Crossing may make the identity of Bellevue more visible and building off of what is there already
 - Building on the brand for visitors, workers, residents
- "City in a Park" Moniker- what is it like in the parks?
- Push Bellevue's identity beyond the moniker "Clean and Safe"

- Luxury - higher quality of life
- Convenient connections (where we are located within the region)
- Diversity is our strength
- Agriculture (historical/identity/educational)
 - Blueberries, strawberries, snowpeas
 - Kelsey Creek Barn
 - Going blueberry picking is common activity in Bellevue
 - Plum trees you can eat
 - Tribal connections to the land - agriculture/industry tore down forests that were sacred
 - Regional Connectivity - bike, walking and bus (go from home to city) disinvesting from cars
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- Bellevue Demographics [Website](#)
 - Ukrainian population
 - Foreign born residents, tech workers, immigrants, refugees
 - Second only to MIT (Cambridge) for patent submissions - comparative to Boulder, CO, Arlington VA, other tech communities
 - Bellevue was perceived as a suburb of rich white people in the 1990s, now a majority community of color.
 - 'Bellevue welcomes the World' 'Our diversity is our strength'
 - Many projects in Bellevue about the history of local Japanese Americans (Farmers - blueberry, strawberry, peas, etc) 27% of the school population was Japanese before WW2. Then after WW2 some laws were made against people who were not US born and state they could not own/buy land.

Criteria of The Crossing:

- All ages
- Iconic
- Cozy environment as you walk over the highway
 - Enclosed environment experience
- Concept of "rooms"
- Potential for food and coffee carts
- Human scale
 - help Bellevue residents (in all their diversity!) feel that downtown is theirs
- Branding - this project could be the branding of Bellevue
 - Middle of city
- Regional brand - this project will be pushing the brand (Bellevue striving for its new identity/ or moving away from its old identity) leave behind the old brand (car centric - Boeing engineers - suburban)
- Variety of people that live in Bellevue - diversity - New residents fusing with past with present residents
- Audacious, visionary and bold

- It will be the connection to what will be the next downtown (Wilburton side)
- Gives the opportunity to tell a story - "who we are and where we are going"
 - Future focused
- Heal the divide/s
 - Natural systems
 - Mobility/transportation/access to areas of the city/neighborhoods
 - socioeconomic
- Ownership - How do we help Bellevue residents, in all their diversity, feel that downtown is theirs
- It needs to be more than a bridge, something that captures imaginations, sparks delight
 - The art makes it more than an infrastructure project
- How will the idea of a "City in a Park" expand into the future
- Playfulness and fun - harmonize the built environment with nature (parks and lake)
- Health and wellness benefits
- Push the boundaries!
- Digest the artwork at different transportation speeds (so walking you need something every so many feet)
 - biker needs every 150 feet/ walker needs every 50 feet
 - cars (lets see what they can see from highway)
 - Light rail (can they see it?)
 - maybe best experience is to walk it like a park

Functional

- Shade & stops
- Address noise (from highway 405)
 - Points of interest on the ends, since too much noise in the middle?
- Park etiquette (walking and strolling)
- Programming or not
 - Cultural celebrations that are processional and move many people through space
 - Mobile programming for parade, rock and roll marathon
 - Not the best places to congregate and crossing could be great in this area (debatable)
- People going over the crossing is most important
 - will cross 6 street, but over 405 is most important view shed
- People don't walk very far - focus on artworks at ends because people don't walk very far
 - You will have to go ½ miles or ¾ mile to get anywhere
- Linear Artworks that you need to go from end to end to get the whole concept
 - Or could be about perspective (multiple layers over a distance form one image)
 - something interactive (working out/exercise, AR/VR)
 - Game on the path for kids as they walk across
- Bikes and scooters mostly
- Tech could be brought into temporary projects (10 year long projects)

- “Interior space/walking and biking experience” (vs the physical bridge you see from the highways) is most important
 - contemplate the Crossing before buildings and after buildings are built
- Kid friendly all ages - families walk - go from node to node - round trip experiences
- Collective experience of all the artworks
- People will use it to go out to the woods and wineries
- People come into downtown for date night
- Barbell (both ends) is where the programming and the people gather (like event or movie)
- Gathering at the barbell (each end of the crossing)

Possible sites/opportunities for future artwork

- Guardrails (shapes and holes of fence)
- Planters
 - Moveable planters
- Canopies
- Groundscape - sandblasting designs
- Lighting underneath (electrical needs)
- Overlook towards Mt Rainier (middle of crossing)
 - Mountain view “mountains out”

Community suggestions

- Community garden on the GC
- Tomato growing contest
- Make a big tree
- Farm
 - Blueberries, strawberries, snowpeas
 - White Barn
- Show how much Wildlife in Bellevue (salmon in our streams)
 - connecting people to our natural systems could be the artwork themes
- Crossing could be a "refuge" - we are restoring the the lost connections but it can be a place to go to escape the heat or the built environment
 - Crossing as a refuge - could be the master plan (plays into ideas of home, repair, safety of storms, tribes, history, water systems)
- Emerald necklace for Bellevue where the sparkly water could be the jewels of the necklace
- Make the crossing a very healthy thing - repair connection of plants, organisms, natural systems
- Make a story that is about the history (like in Hawaii) as you walk across - learn story through the phone - can be a variety of experiences
- Showcase the talents of residents of Bellevue (tech talents, art talents, etc)
- Whimsical sounds added

Anecdotal

- PILOTI (Marc Fornes Artwork) - changed the public art game of Bellevue

Abstract sculpture - people can read into it what they like

- Storm drains lead to the creek - connect people to the streams and the wildlife - getting people to understand what is under our feet
- people love bellevue for many reasons but clean
- going blueberry picking is common activity in bellevue - plum trees you can eat from - more inviting spaces that tell the story about bellevue
- Include the tribes (many tribes)
- All the rain goes to streams without treatment - we should highlight the rain of waterflow
 - "Where does rainfall go" - it might go through soil, go to fish,
- Sparkly parts of the water could be incorporated into design
- Climate resilience - lately more significant climate events - heat wave - storm event - high heat and smoke - more urban tree canopy - heat pumps -
- Greenery as a blessing - neighborhoods are like living in a forest - some people from other areas of the world might not love tree canopies
- Water hits on a number of different levels - the rain makes things lush and green
- Daylighting the streams