

CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION

2021 Annual Comprehensive Plan Amendments: Northeast Bellevue and Northwest Bellevue Neighborhood Area Plans.

Mac Cummins AICP, Director, 452-6191
Emil A. King AICP, Assistant Director, 452-7223
Thara Johnson, Comprehensive Planning Manager, 452-4087
Elizabeth de Regt AICP, Senior Planner, 452-2890
Gwen Rousseau AICP, Senior Planner, 452-2743
Brooke Brod, Community Engagement Lead, 452-6930
Community Development Department

DIRECTION NEEDED FROM COUNCIL

DIRECTION

The City Council will review the 2021 proposed plan amendments for Northeast Bellevue and Northwest Bellevue Neighborhood Area Plans. Planning Commission chair Mohammad Malakoutian will present the Commission's recommendations.

Following tonight's study session, direct staff regarding any amendments to or outstanding concerns regarding the recommended plans and provide direction on Council's preferred next steps toward action on the 2021 proposed plan amendments.

RECOMMENDATION

Direct staff to return with Ordinances approving the 2021 proposed amendments regarding the Northeast Bellevue and Northwest Bellevue Neighborhood Area plans as recommended by the Planning Commission.

BACKGROUND & ANALYSIS

Comprehensive Plan Amendment Process

Updated Northeast Bellevue and Northwest Bellevue Neighborhood Area Plans are proposed as part of the annual Comprehensive Plan Amendment (CPA) process. City Council's last briefing on this topic occurred on March 22 during the community engagement phase. The approval CPA process, set forth in the Land Use Code (LUC) at Part 20.30I LUC, begins with the Planning Commission reviewing the amendments, holding public hearings, and submitting recommendations to the City Council. Council reviews the recommendations and then acts to approve or deny each CPA in turn. The Final Review decision criteria for such action is listed in [LUC 20.30I.150](#) and included in this document under "Policy Impact".

Volume 2 of Bellevue's Comprehensive Plan includes Neighborhood Area, or Subarea, plans for each of the City's 16 Neighborhood Areas. Great Neighborhoods is the new program by which staff seek community input to update these plans on a rotating basis, many of which have not been significantly

altered since the 1980s. On June 1, 2020, staff presented to City Council the plan to re-initiate work on the first two plans chosen by Council for updating: Northeast Bellevue and Northwest Bellevue. Work was originally initiated by Council in 2018 but was paused due to staffing constraints. Following the June 2020 re-launch, the City initiated and conducted a robust outreach effort to both communities as outlined in the following section. Online engagement and resources were key throughout the process, particularly as the City adjusted to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and its limitations on in-person engagement opportunities. To drive participation in the neighborhood planning process, the Community Development team conducted an outreach campaign that included email, traditional mail, flyers and posters, social media and digital advertising.

After thorough consideration through several study sessions, notice, and July 14 Final Review public hearings, the Planning Commission recommended approval of these 2021 proposed plan amendments. The CPAs satisfy all Land Use Code decision criteria for Final Review of a CPA (LUC 20.30I.150). See Attachments A and B for the formal recommendations for each Neighborhood Area Plan, both of which the Planning Commission recommended for approval unanimously with 5-0 votes on July 14.

Great Neighborhoods Process

The engagement process used the following phases to work sequentially through the proposed CPAs.

- **Phase 1 (summer 2020)** – Build awareness of the planning process and understand the community's core values.
- **Phase 2 (fall 2020)** – Define the vision and develop the neighborhood profile.
- **Phase 3 (winter & spring 2021)** – Explore challenges and opportunities facing each neighborhood and develop the policies.

In each phase, the conversation was structured around what staff heard from residents. The results of the initial values survey informed the vision workshops that followed. The feedback shared at the data walks determined the topics for the brainstorming sessions that followed. The ideas and concerns surfaced at those brainstorming sessions informed the draft policies themselves. Ensuring broad participation is always a key goal for any engagement process, so this process provided many opportunities for people to participate. Each set of events was offered on different days of the week, and at different times of day to accommodate busy schedules. Each virtual event had a corresponding online engagement opportunity so that people could participate on their own time, at their convenience. A postage-paid questionnaire mailed to every household in each neighborhood provided people who were unaccustomed to virtual events or online engagement an opportunity to share feedback.

To support culturally relevant outreach, the Great Neighborhoods program piloted the use of Cultural Outreach Assistants, who provided language support and built relationships with key community partners in the Chinese, Korean, Spanish-speaking, and South Asian communities. In Northeast Bellevue, a partnership was established with Interlake High School to work with students to help them design and lead two engagement events geared towards capturing youth voice.

Method	Northeast Bellevue	Northwest Bellevue
Virtual Events (general)	10 events	10 events
Targeted Group or 1-on-1 Sessions	15 sessions	20 sessions
Cultural Outreach Assistants*	6 presentations and 76 meetings with individuals or organizations	
Engaging Bellevue: Aware (site visitors)	Info & 6 engagement areas ~2800	Info & 6 engagement areas ~2300
Informed (longer site visitors)	1200 (out of above 2800)	926 (out of above 2300)
Engaged (visitors with feedback)	323 (out of above 1200)	226 (out of above 1900)
Mailed Questionnaire	401 returned (10% of households)	269 returned (6% of households)

Following the bulk of community outreach and resulting draft plans and policies, staff spent an additional month gathering feedback on the draft plans, including focused topic-based events and a digital open house with multiple City departments available to discuss the draft policies with residents. An online survey during this period also asked residents to rate how much they agreed with the draft policies and solicited feedback that ultimately led to further policy amendments prior to Planning Commission review.

To understand the reach and effectiveness of the Great Neighborhoods process, it is useful to compare this engagement effort to similar neighborhood specific projects. The 2017 **Downtown Livability** project and the 2018 **Wilburton Commercial Area Study** both focused on updates to a particular neighborhood. While the scope of these projects differed in focus from the updates for Northwest Bellevue and Northeast Bellevue, they provide a relevant comparison for these two plans. Each of these past projects utilized one to two surveys totaling 200-300 responses for each neighborhood. Their websites saw similar or slightly fewer views compared to each of the Northeast Bellevue and Northwest Bellevue sites.

Moreover, Great Neighborhoods saw equal, if not higher, levels of public participation through its outreach than these previous neighborhood specific proposals. For example, thousands of individuals for each neighborhood were aware of the project through visiting the online portals, while each household received two separate mailings about the project over the course of its engagement phases. Hundreds of individuals in each neighborhood also gave direct feedback through surveys and the mailed questionnaire in addition to the many residents who spent time directly with staff and other residents during community events and meetings. Taken in total, this multi-pronged approach resulted in varied, detailed, and numerous comments from many areas of each neighborhood's community. These comments often represented views across the spectrum for any particular issue, so each resulting plan aims to find that Neighborhood Area's middle ground to best reflect this variety of input to represent the area's community as a whole.

Plan Role and Organization

The Comprehensive Plan is a long-range planning document, focusing on broad policies meant to guide planning efforts for decades to come. While the heart of the new Neighborhood Area Plans are the policies, they are supported by narrative throughout, shaping the overall vision for the community,

defining the area's important themes, and discussing the opportunities and challenges targeted by the policies. The recommended plans therefore include the following sections, which are reflected in the phases of community outreach described above.

1. A *Vision Statement* to act as a beacon for the rest of the plan.
2. A *Neighborhood Area Profile* to present information about what is unique about each neighborhood area.
3. *Neighborhood Context* that links the previous sections to the policies that follow by highlighting the main themes found within the neighborhood discussions and defining the "why" behind the policies themselves.
4. *Policies* to realize the Vision, including future plan directions. These are organized based on the Challenges and Opportunities facing the community that were identified by residents themselves.

While the comments received for each Neighborhood Area were generally unique to that plan, both sets of comments ultimately fit into the following five overarching topics used to organize the policies in each recommended plan:

1. *Sense of Place*: Addressing what is unique about the physical neighborhood.
2. *Sense of Community*: Working towards a connected community of neighbors.
3. *Housing Affordability*: Creating a diverse array of housing at a range of affordability levels.
4. *Mobility and Access*: Connecting the community through a variety of mobility methods.
5. *Environment*: Caring for and enhancing the natural environment of the neighborhood.

The Comprehensive Plan, including the Neighborhood Area/Subarea Plans found within Volume 2, does not include detailed action items or implementation strategies. While these action items and strategies are outside of the scope of this project, staff have included for reference a number of action ideas from the community in the Neighborhood Proposals list outlined in Attachment J. This list will not be adopted as part of the Comprehensive Plan and is not included for City Council direction or action. It has been provided to the appropriate City departments to ensure the dissemination of community ideas and preferences to those working on each implementation topic.

Creating a Plan: Northeast Bellevue

The proposed CPA for Northeast Bellevue can be found in Attachments C through E. While no changes to the land use designations are proposed, this amendment does include an update of the Neighborhood Area boundaries to match the new boundaries defined in the 2015 Comprehensive Plan. The Northeast Bellevue land use plan map has been expanded and contracted to reflect these changes, and those additions and subtractions have been equally reflected in the Crossroads (Attachment D) and Southeast Bellevue (Attachment E) land use plan maps.

In addition, policies that once resided in the Crossroads plan but that apply to the area shifted to Northeast Bellevue have been moved to the Northeast Bellevue plan. This includes references to not allowing new multifamily and retail uses in certain parts of Northeast Bellevue. Staff have recommended that any changes to these policies be reviewed in tandem with the corresponding Crossroads policies at a future date. Policies no longer relevant to the Crossroads plan have also been stricken from that plan as part of this amendment, as shown in Attachment D.

The engagement report, which is [available on Engaging Bellevue](#) and in the Council Library and is summarized in Attachment H, describes the outreach efforts and feedback received throughout the Great Neighborhoods process for Northeast Bellevue. The key topics for Northeast Bellevue residents were discussed in detail during the Planning Commission's review, particularly during [the July 7, 2021 Study Session](#), where the policies that relate to each of the below topics were highlighted and discussed. These include:

- Concerns about the impact of nearby development in BelRed, Redmond/Overlake and Crossroads on traffic, and interest in increased collaboration between the cities of Bellevue and Redmond to address these concerns; interest in maintaining a buffer between these uses and Northeast Bellevue;
- Desire for better connections (for pedestrians, bikes, and cars) across busy arterials bordering and within the neighborhood;
- Discussion about the benefits and concerns of introducing new housing typologies such as duplexes or detached accessory dwelling units (DADUs) to the area;
- Desire to protect trees from removal, particularly during site redevelopment; and
- Interest in seeing the open space and grove of trees within the private property of the Bellevue Technology Center preserved (this is currently addressed, in part, by a Concomitant Zoning Agreement).

Since the Planning Commission public hearing and the resulting July 14 recommendation, residents of Northeast Bellevue have continued to provide comments to staff. These comments are consolidated and included in the Council Library. They focus on issues around housing options, safety in the neighborhood, and coordination with Redmond. While each of these topics was discussed with residents, incorporated into the plan, and discussed with the Planning Commission, some residents are calling for changes or additional strength to be added in these areas. More detail is provided below on the housing options work, as not all residents agree on this particular issue.

Creating a Plan: Northwest Bellevue

The proposed amendment for the Northwest Bellevue Neighborhood Area (previously North Bellevue Subarea) can be found in Attachment F. It does not include any land use plan map changes nor does it include any changes to the border because the 2015 Neighborhood Area borders match the older Subarea borders for this area.

The engagement report, which [is available on Engaging Bellevue](#) and in the Council Library and is summarized in Attachment I, describes the outreach efforts and feedback received throughout the Great Neighborhoods process. The key topics for Northwest Bellevue residents were discussed in detail during the Planning Commission review, particularly at [the July 7 Study Session](#), where the policies that relate to each of the below topics were highlighted and discussed. They include:

- Interest in preserving and celebrating the large variety of sub-neighborhoods within Northwest Bellevue (the area includes many single-family neighborhoods from a variety of eras but also hosts many multifamily areas of different sizes, densities, and styles);
- Calls for action to proactively address the “mega-mansions” that are replacing older homes in the area. As highlighted in the recent [State of Our Neighborhoods](#) discussion with Council, the

Northwest Bellevue Neighborhood Area has witnessed this change in the last 10 years, with over 17 percent of all single-family homes in the area torn down and rebuilt in that timeframe;

- Desire to protect Northwest Bellevue from the impacts of Downtown Bellevue, including buffers of landscaping or gradients of scale as well as other measures to address traffic, crime, and other impacts of the proximity between the two;
- Discussion about the benefits and concerns of introducing DADUs to the area;
- Concerns for the safety of pedestrians within each sub-neighborhood, particularly where sidewalks are missing; and
- Desire to protect trees from removal, particularly during site redevelopment.

In the Planning Commission's July 14 recommendation, the Commission noted that the City Council could engage in "additional conversation to ensure that the Northwest Bellevue policies align with and address safety issues." This followed a conversation during the Planning Commission process about increased pedestrian safety, sidewalk construction, and Vision Zero. If Council chooses to hold such a conversation, they may reference Attachment G, which includes staff suggestions for amendments to the CPA that could address this concern.

Subsequent to the Planning Commission public hearing and the resulting July 14 recommendation, residents of Northwest Bellevue have continued providing comments to staff. These comments have focused on the same topics mentioned above, with a particular emphasis on DADUs and aging in place. The consolidated comments are also available in the Council Library.

Housing Options

As noted above, both neighborhoods spent a significant amount of time discussing broadened housing options within their neighborhoods. Both recommended plans call for the City to "explore" the introduction of DADUs, with additional policies defining some specific interests of each neighborhood. This language reflects both the even split regarding support for DADUs that was surfaced through a mailed questionnaire and the desire of residents to more fully discuss the regulations that would be necessary if DADUs were permitted.

The comments compiled from all written engagement formats, tallied on page 16 of each Engagement Report, identified housing affordability as the number one challenge for both neighborhoods. Concerns related to property taxes and "mega-mansions" also were common across both neighborhoods. These issues all relate to the high cost of housing in the area. Many residents suggested allowing new housing types as a way to combat these rising costs. These concerns were clear in both the early values survey and the data walks that followed, where residents saw data related to neighborhood demographics such as income and housing cost-burden as well as data related to transportation, land use, and other topics.

Residents brought this topic up on their own, but the City Council had also directed staff to support this conversation. Neighborhood Area Plans are called out in the Comprehensive Plan (Policy HO-15) as a vehicle for allowing DADUs. In addition, the 2017 Affordable Housing Strategy Action B-2 calls to "Update accessory dwelling unit standards and allow detached units in self-selected neighborhoods." This was combined with the clear suggestion from residents of both neighborhoods that staff explore these housing options, which occurred in the following ways.

1. *Housing Affordability Brainstorming Session:* Following the data walks, staff identified several 'buckets' of challenges brought up by both neighborhoods that were used as topics for the subsequent brainstorming sessions: trees/green space, housing affordability, mobility/traffic/safety, and connecting with the community. In each session, staff described the challenges identified by each community and asked the groups (already divided by neighborhood) to brainstorm potential solutions. Every brainstorming group at each housing affordability session, without guidance or suggestions from staff, separately identified changes to accessory dwelling unit and/or detached accessory dwelling unit regulations as a solution to explore making their neighborhood's housing more affordable.
2. *Draft Policy Review:* Staff posted draft policies online and held open houses to discuss these draft policies. Northeast Bellevue residents had expressed some DADU-related reticence up to this point and had also discussed several other housing typologies, such as duplexes, that might fit better with their neighborhood. The policies therefore reflected a desire to start an effort to further explore these options, including considerations for their impact on neighbors that were the primary concern against DADUs in this neighborhood.

The early Northwest Bellevue conversations on housing options were generally positive and led to a draft policy that called for DADUs to be permitted in their neighborhood area. Another encouraged regulations to consider the impact of their presence on the street character, the main stated concern in this neighborhood. Comments from the policy review survey and open house were more negative towards the first of these policies than the original comments had been. This disagreement, when combined with the below results, ultimately led staff to amend the policy that previously called to permit DADUs to one that calls for a future exploration of DADUs as a possible housing affordability solution, much like that for Northeast Bellevue.

3. Staff had also sent out a questionnaire to every household of each neighborhood with questions about some of the most discussed topics in each neighborhood, including two questions about DADUs. These questions and their responses are outlined on pages 9 and 10 of each engagement report. With 401 responses from Northeast Bellevue Households and 269 responses from Northwest Bellevue households, this questionnaire gave a more complete picture of residents' opinions, which in both neighborhoods were nearly perfectly split between residents against DADUs and those in favor of their adoption in their neighborhood. Both neighborhoods had overwhelming support for additional regulations, with open-ended comments assisting staff in understanding the specific concerns.
4. Staff also held a meeting with residents focused on backyard cottages (another name for DADUs) and other housing options. This meeting included initial education on what DADUs are, who generally lives in them, and how other cities have adopted regulations for their use. This discussion helped many residents understand common misconceptions around DADUs and made the resident conversation that followed, separated by neighborhood area, more meaningful and informed. It was clear that a more informed discussion changed some residents' opinions and would be a helpful approach for future conversations on this topic. These discussions also led to a better understanding of the specific concerns for each neighborhood area that are reflected in the final recommended policies.

Following these varied outreach efforts regarding housing options in low density residential areas, each neighborhood have a set of housing options policies unique to their neighborhood. Both call for further exploration of DADUs, while the Northeast Bellevue policies also call for a broader exploration including other alternatives such as duplexes. Some individual residents who have indicated opposition to DADUs have also expressed that they may be open to their presence if certain regulations were adopted. The plans therefore call for exploration that would include discussions of these code regulations in order to inform a final decision for each neighborhood. This exploration could incorporate information from the upcoming Housing Needs Assessment as well as the City's new growth targets and the upcoming conversations on their impact on the City.

Another concern expressed strongly by residents of both neighborhoods was that they were being unfairly singled out as pilot neighborhoods with regard to introducing DADUs. With the upcoming major update to the City's Comprehensive Plan taking up a large portion of staff time for the next several years, it is likely that additional neighborhood plans will not be launched until after the 2024 update is complete. As a result, residents of Northeast Bellevue and Northwest Bellevue have expressed a preference that any discussion about DADUs and other housing options should take into account broader Citywide growth issues and be discussed as it relates to all neighborhoods simultaneously rather than theirs alone followed several years later by the next pair of neighborhoods to complete new neighborhood plans.

In addition to the community conversations regarding housing options, the Planning Commission felt it was important to relay the relationship to the Citywide Affordable Housing Strategy. The Resolutions for both Northeast Bellevue and Northwest Bellevue include language recommending that Council "assess housing affordability policies [in each plan] to ensure that they align with and are evaluated in the context of Citywide policies and the vision for the City's Affordable Housing Strategy."

Citywide Topics of Interest

Neighborhood Area Plans focus on specific geographic areas, with policies used to define what is unique about each neighborhood. Certain topics that impact neighborhoods on a Citywide scale came up repeatedly during Great Neighborhoods outreach efforts. These include:

1. *Updates to code related to tree preservation and/or removal* – Many residents from both neighborhoods have called strongly for immediate action to protect their neighborhood's tree canopy from being cut down. This is already called for in the recently adopted Environmental Stewardship Plan. Rather than implementing individual code changes that impact separate neighborhoods, a larger effort is planned as an upcoming workplan item.
2. *Policies limiting multifamily and/or retail land uses within the larger Crossroads area* –There is a history associated with the existing Crossroads policies that are being shifted over to the Northeast Bellevue plan. Rather than approaching a discussion about only the small portion of the affected area that is being shifted over to Northeast Bellevue, staff recommend discussing these policies as a whole in the context of future work program items such as the update of the Crossroads Subarea plan, and the growth targets and housing needs assessment that are part of the upcoming Comprehensive Plan update. These particular policies would therefore be

revisited when the related Crossroads policies are discussed as part of a larger Citywide informed discussion.

POLICY & FISCAL IMPACTS

Policy Impact

Comprehensive Plan

The Growth Management Act states that comprehensive plans may be amended no more frequently than once per year (with limited exceptions) so that the cumulative effect of the proposals can be considered.

State Environmental Policy Act

The Environmental Coordinator for the City of Bellevue determined that the 2020 Comprehensive Plan Amendment work program will not result in any probable, significant adverse environmental impacts. A final threshold Determination of Non-Significance (DNS) was issued on October 8, 2020.

Final Review Decision Criteria for Comprehensive Plan Amendments

The Planning Commission may recommend, and the City Council may approve or approve with modifications an amendment to the Comprehensive Plan if all the Final Review Decision Criteria from Section 20.30I.150 of the Land Use Code are met:

- A.1 There exists obvious technical error in the pertinent Comprehensive Plan provision; or
- B.1 The proposed amendment is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and other goals and policies of the City, the Countywide Planning Policies (CPP), the Growth Management Act, and other applicable law; and
- B.2 The proposed amendment addresses the interests and changed needs of the entire City as identified in its long-range planning and policy documents; and
- B.3 The proposed amendment addresses significantly changed conditions since the last time the pertinent Comprehensive Plan map or text was amended. See LUC 20.50.046 (below) for the definition of “significantly changed conditions”; and
 - Significantly changed conditions are defined as:** Demonstrating evidence of change such as unanticipated consequences of an adopted policy or changed conditions on the subject property or its surrounding area, or changes related to the pertinent Plan map or text; where such change has implications of a magnitude that need to be addressed for the Comprehensive Plan to function as an integrated whole. This definition applies only to Part 20.30I Amendment and Review of the Comprehensive Plan (LUC 20.50.046); and
- B.4 If a site-specific proposed amendment, the subject property is suitable for development in general conformance with adjacent land use and the surrounding development pattern, and with zoning standards under the potential zoning classifications; and
- B.5 The proposed amendment demonstrates a public benefit and enhances the public health, safety, and welfare of the City.

Fiscal Impact

There is no direct fiscal impact associated with implementing these policy changes.

OPTIONS

1. Direct staff to return with Ordinances approving the 2021 proposed amendments regarding the Northeast Bellevue and Northwest Bellevue Neighborhood Area plans as recommended by the Planning Commission.
2. Direct staff to return with any requested information for an additional study session covering the Neighborhood Area plans in more detail.
3. Direct staff to return with Ordinances approving the 2021 proposed amendments regarding the Northeast Bellevue and Northwest Bellevue Neighborhood Area plans, with modifications.
4. Direct staff to return with Ordinances denying the 2021 proposed amendments regarding the Northeast Bellevue and Northwest Bellevue Neighborhood Area plans as recommended by the Planning Commission.
5. Provide alternate direction to staff.

ATTACHMENTS & AVAILABLE DOCUMENTS

- A. Resolution of the Planning Commission: Northeast Bellevue Neighborhood Area Plan
- B. Resolution of the Planning Commission: Northwest Bellevue Neighborhood Area Plan
- C. Proposed Northeast Bellevue Neighborhood Area Plan
- D. Proposed Strikedraft of Crossroads Subarea Plan
- E. Proposed Updated Southeast Bellevue Land Use Plan Map
- F. Proposed Northwest Bellevue Neighborhood Area Plan
- G. Northwest Bellevue: Potential Safety Amendment
- H. Northeast Bellevue Engagement Summary
- I. Northwest Bellevue Engagement Summary
- J. Neighborhood Proposals
- K. NE Comments

AVAILABLE IN COUNCIL LIBRARY

Application materials, public comments, staff recommendations, and other related materials for each CPA

Neighborhood Area Planning Engagement Reports 2021: Northeast Bellevue and Northwest Bellevue

Northeast Bellevue Consolidated Continued Public Comments

Northwest Bellevue Consolidated Continued Public Comments

2017 Affordable Housing Strategy