

# MEMORANDUM



Bellevue Parks &  
Community Services

Date: May 10, 2022

To: Mayor Robinson, Deputy Mayor Nieuwenhuis, and Bellevue City Councilmembers

From: David Hamilton, Chair  
Parks & Community Services Board

RE: Parks long-term funding strategy

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The Parks & Community Services Board appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback on areas of focus for additional investment in Bellevue's parks and open space system. This forward-looking action is one grounded in history. Since the 1950's, consistent funding from a series of voter-approved bonds and levies has been one necessary tool of many used to build the city's parks and open space system. To aid the City Council's decision-making process, the board identified both higher level principles for a future funding strategy, as well as a series of recommendations related to focus areas within the Parks & Open Space System Plan.

**Overall principles** recommended by the board for the parks funding strategy:

- Include a mix of projects, some that can be implemented and delivered quickly along with others that are phased investments in larger long-term project objectives.
- Seek to move the needle on Bellevue's goal of bringing a park or trail within walking distance to each and every Bellevue resident by investing in acquisition and park development in neighborhoods that are currently not served or are underserved.
- Address the impacts of growth by moving with haste to preserve remaining open space opportunities, particularly within and around those neighborhoods experiencing or anticipating rapid growth
- Choose a mechanism that delivers significant funding early in the process allowing the city to kick-start leveraged partnerships, secure opportunistic property acquisitions and take full advantage of development windows.
- Advance the adopted Council Vision and Priorities of a High Quality Built and Natural Environment, Making Great Places Where You Want to Be and Achieving Human Potential

For the **Trails and Open Space** focus area, the board recommends:

- Continued expansion of the city's park trail system
- Acquisition and preservation of undeveloped open space

Bellevue's extensive trail system is one of the most used features of our parks and open space system. Trails connect neighborhood to neighborhood and park to park while providing needed and easy access to nature. Bellevue residents regularly voice support for placing trail development and open space preservation at the top of their priority list. Undeveloped open space is exceedingly scarce and increasingly prone to development. Expanding trails and acquiring undeveloped open space with new funding is one way to provide a tangible and immediate return on investment for the community.

For the **Urban Park Systems** focus area, the board recommends:

- Continued investment in parks serving Downtown Bellevue
- Invest in creation of new parks serving BelRed
- New investment in parks and trails serving the Wilburton commercial area that support implementation of the Grand Connection and Easttrail

Bellevue is planning for an additional 35,000 housing units and 70,000 jobs. This future growth is focused in high-density urban areas. These areas hold unique challenges for developing parks and open space yet are critical to retaining the city's character as a City in a Park. Investment is necessary in existing urban parks such as Ashwood Park. Additionally, investment is needed immediately in developing urban areas like BelRed and Wilburton to preserve land suitable for parks and recreation before such opportunities are lost.

For the **Neighborhood and Community Park Facilities** focus area, the board recommends:

- New neighborhood park acquisition and development
- Continued acquisition to expand existing community parks

The Parks & Open Space System Plan and Environmental Stewardship Initiative share a goal to equitably increase walkable access to parks and trails. This can be accomplished by acquiring and developing neighborhood parks in identified underserved areas such as Eastgate and Factoria, among others. While adding new parks, the city should also prioritize expansion of and improvements to existing neighborhood and community parks, recognizing their role in creating a sense of place and community for our city. From the filbert orchards of Surrey Downs to the indigenous fishing settlements within Mercer Slough, neighborhood and community parks serve many roles including conserving and interpreting Bellevue's historic and cultural landscapes.

For the **Active Recreation** focus area, the board recommends:

- Funding to support continued progress toward a new Aquatic Center
- Park improvements that increase public use and programming

The City's funding strategy should invest in new park features that are responsive to contemporary community needs, including but not limited to, off-leash dog areas, pickleball courts and cricket grounds. It should also invest in larger long-term goals that meet community recreation needs, such as investing in the Council Priority for a new public aquatic facility.

For the **Water Access** focus area, the board recommends:

- Continued phased investment in Meydenbauer Bay Park
- Funding for Bellevue's first waterfront park on Lake Sammamish

In the outreach for this and previous Parks & Open Space System Plans, the Bellevue community consistently supports increased public access to the city's shorelines. Today's public access is limited and inequitable with most access on Lake Washington and minimal access on Lake Sammamish. Continued investments in the Council-adopted master plan for Meydenbauer Bay Park advance Council Priorities including the Grand Connection. Developing the city's first waterfront park on Lake Sammamish will achieve the long-held community goal of linking parks and trails to connect one lake to the other across the city.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide feedback and insight on the exciting prospect of additional needed investment in Bellevue's parks and open space system. The Parks & Community Services Board is here to help in any way it can. If you have any questions about the board's work, please contact me at [dhamilton@bellevuewa.gov](mailto:dhamilton@bellevuewa.gov).