

Preliminary Community Engagement Report

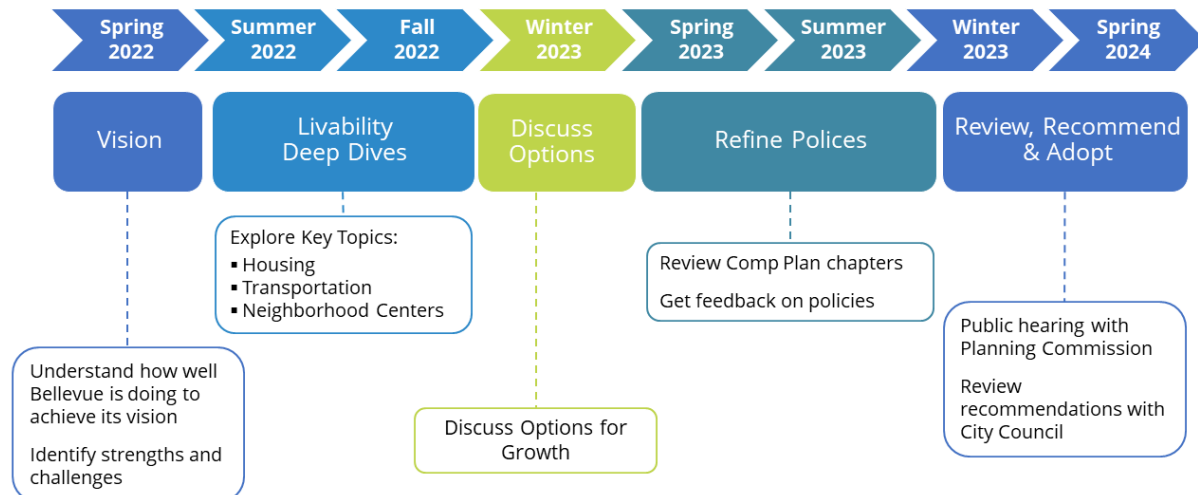
Phase 1 – Spring 2022

Introduction

The Comprehensive Plan is a foundational document used to guide long-range growth and development in the city. It is used by City Council, boards and commissions, and city staff to inform decision making on housing, transportation, land use, infrastructure development, and more. Past updates to Bellevue's Comprehensive Plan have led to the creation of new, mixed-use, transit-oriented neighborhoods like BelRed; the adoption of a citywide Environmental Stewardship Plan; and partnerships on affordable housing.

Periodic updates to the Comprehensive Plan happen every ten years and provide a great opportunity to step back and look at the city in a holistic way to ensure the city is on the right track and can continue to provide people with a great quality of life.

The update to the Comprehensive Plan will take just over two years and incorporate input from a variety of sources including technical analyses of key issues, review existing plans and polices, input from boards and commissions, and community input.



Throughout the process community members have the opportunity to learn, ask questions, and provide input and feedback that help inform the Comprehensive Plan. The process is divided into several phases.

Phase 1: Affirming the Vision (Spring 2022). Reflect on how well the city is doing in achieving its vision. Identify strengths to build on and challenges that need to be addressed.

Phase 2: Explore Issues and Options for Growth (Summer 2022 - Winter 2023). Discuss key issues related to growth, examine data, and develop options for consideration. Identify a preferred growth strategy.

Phase 3: Refine Policies (Spring & Summer 2023). Get feedback on specific policies and specific Comprehensive Plan chapters. Develop final draft for review.

Phase 4: Legislative Review (Winter 2023 - Spring 2024). Planning Commission reviews draft Comprehensive Plan, holds public hearing, and makes recommendation to City Council. City Council reviews and votes on adoption.

Overview of Outreach Activities

Phase 1 of community engagement began in late-February and continued through mid-May. Engagement goals included informing the public about the periodic update; educating people on the purpose and importance of the Comprehensive Plan; and gathering input on the city's existing vision and identify strengths and challenges. The planning team used a variety of techniques to reach as broad an audience as possible.

- 2 virtual workshops
- 1 in-person open house
- 6 presentations to community groups and neighborhood associations
- Mailed flyer and questionnaire to all 64,241 households in Bellevue
- 13 tabling events at key community locations and neighborhood gatherings
- 10 youth focused workshops at Big Picture and Newport High Schools
- 1 Spanish language workshop for the Latinx community

Support for Equitable Engagement

Bellevue is a very diverse city. About 50% of the 152,600 (2021 WA OFM) residents in Bellevue identify as persons of color, 41% of the population identifies as foreign-born, and 44% of residents speak a language other than English at home (2019 ACS). To support culturally relevant outreach, the planning team utilized Cultural Outreach Assistants to conduct outreach to key communities. Working from the principle of “meeting people where they’re at,” the Cultural Outreach Assistants were able to organize tabling opportunities at key locations including grocery stores and faith communities. Cultural Outreach Assistants also built strong relationships with community partners that led to in-language and culturally relevant workshops. Highlights include:

Spanish Language Workshop for the Latino/a community

The planning team partnered with 4Tomorrow and Latino Unidos, to host an in-person workshop at Stevenson Elementary that brought together 45 individuals for an introduction to the Comprehensive Plan and in-depth discussions. Attendees shared their thoughts on transportation, sustainability, affordability and more.

Empowering Chinese Youth for Civic Engagement

Working with Little Masters, a Chinese community youth focused leadership development program, the planning team organized an in-person workshop for 25 middle and high school students that introduced the Comprehensive Plan and included a discussion about careers within city government. Students were then able to practice their civic engagement skills by asking their family members and peers to fill out the Comprehensive Plan questionnaire. All total the students were able to collect 117 additional questionnaires.

Engaging Youth

Given the extended time horizon for the Comprehensive Plan, twenty years, it is important to hear from youth. After all, today's youth will be adults when the results of this plan come to fruition. To reach and engage youth, the planning team developed partnerships with Newport High School and Big Picture High School and worked with the Sustainability Ambassadors, a youth leadership program

focused on climate issues, to educate students about planning issues and invite them to provide input through the questionnaire. Overall, the planning team led workshops for 8 classes and reached over 220 students. That led to a significant jump in youth participation in the questionnaire with 46% of responses received in the timeframe following these workshops being from youth.

Overview of Participation

Community members had a variety of ways to learn about the Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update and share input. The primary way for people to provide input was through the vision questionnaire. The vision questionnaire was mailed to every single residential household in Bellevue, was available online in English and in Bellevue's top seven languages (Chinese, Spanish, Korean, Russian, Japanese, Vietnamese, Hindi). It was also distributed at in-person workshops and tabling events. The city received 3,326 responses in total.

Hearing from the many diverse communities that make up Bellevue is a priority for the planning team and intentional efforts were and continue to be made to build relationships, nurture partnerships, and meet people where they are. Some of the demographic highlights include (city-wide demographics from the 2019 American Community Survey (5-year estimates):

- 36% of respondents were people of color (about half of the city's population are people of color)
- 19% of respondents were renters (about half of households rent in the city)
- 28% of respondents live in multifamily housing (about half of units in the city are multifamily)
- 32% were born after 1980 and are Millennials or Gen Z (that is 42 or younger – a little over half of the population is under 40)
- 124 individuals submitted responses in a language other than English (about 44 percent of people speak a language other than English at home, about 7 percent of households do not have a member who speaks English well).

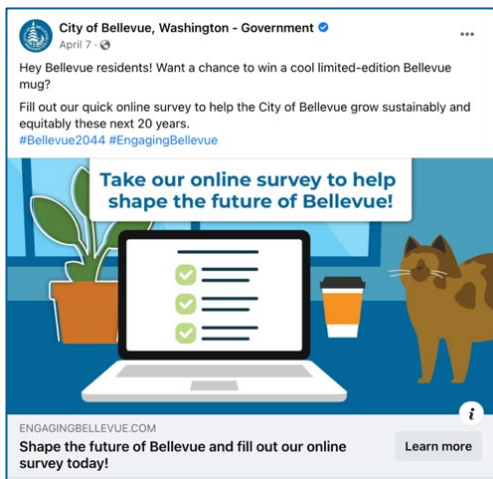
Respondents were, in general older, whiter, and more likely to be homeowners than the general population of Bellevue. Specific outreach to communities of color, immigrant communities and youth through tabling events, presentations and community meetings increased the response by these groups. The results from this effort are an improvement over previous efforts, but continued work is needed to support more representative participation.

Communication & Outreach

It's important to note that participation was based on self-selection; people chose whether or not to engage in the planning process. Awareness of the project, relevance to the individual, sense of urgency about the decisions to be made, culturally appropriate engagement, and comfort with city processes are all factors that drive or depress participation.

Having a robust communications and outreach plan can help build awareness and boost participation. To reach as broad an audience as possible, the planning team used both digital and analog methods to inform people about the Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update and let them know about opportunities to provide input including:

- Mailer sent to all 64,241 households that included a questionnaire that could be returned (postage paid), information on how to respond to the questions in the city's top seven languages, and information about upcoming community events.
- Regular posts on all of the city's social media channels – Facebook, Twitter, and Nextdoor – that received a total of 325 – 2,700 impressions.
- Four posts on WeChat throughout phase 1 shared information and invited people to participate in the online questionnaire and had 3,231 views.



Additionally, the planning team ran a targeted digital advertising campaign from April 7 – May 7 that aimed to boost awareness and participation from people between the ages of 20-40, a demographic that is typically underrepresented in planning efforts.

The ads linked directly to the Comprehensive Plan survey on the Engaging Bellevue site. In addition to meeting industry standards for click through rates the ad campaign was successful in reaching the target demographic with 63% of respondents reporting they were Millennials or Gen Z, significantly increasing this demographic participation rate over past questionnaires.

Summary of Input

Phase 1 of outreach and engagement for the Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update focused on obtaining high-level feedback on how well the city is doing in achieving its vision, identifying strengths the city can build on, and challenges that must be addressed. Engagement activities were designed to appeal to a broad audience and invite as many people into the planning process as possible.

In-Person and Virtual Events

In addition to targeted outreach to individual community groups and tabling opportunities, the planning team hosted three public events where attendees had the opportunity to learn about the Comprehensive Plan and the Periodic Update process as well as engage in open-ended discussion about ideas, concerns, and hopes for the future. These events included the following:

- **Neighborhood Leadership Gathering** (February 17, virtual): Participants from a range of neighborhoods across the city heard an overview of the Comprehensive Plan update process and participated in an extended question and answer session with staff. Themes from these questions ranged across many topics, with a focus on the relationship between housing, transportation, and jobs in a growing city with regional draw. Concerns about the negative impacts of growth, the influence of the development community, the high cost of housing, and issues related to homelessness were common.
- **Bellevue 2044 Vision Event** (March 22, virtual): Attendees heard a presentation about the project as a whole, what past and ongoing trends are likely to shape Bellevue's future, and how to take part in the process. They then participated in a discussion regarding their vision for the future of Bellevue.

- **Bellevue 2044 Open House** (May 7, in person): Visitors were able to learn about the project and its many individual topics. They interacted with staff and asked questions while also participating in interactive displays. These displays asked for feedback about the livability of the city, asking what makes a great place to live, work, or play in turn. Data was then tied to these topics so participants could reflect on some of those trends and ask for more information that can be brought forward in future events.

In these events the strengths that people brought up most were the friendliness of the city, good city governance, great educational opportunities, and the strong economy.

There were a range of housing related concerns brought up in these conversations. Some people called for more density and housing types. Others raised concerns about the scale of new housing being built with very large “mega-houses” replacing smaller homes. Other people expressed concerns about the pace and amount of growth and urged the city to move more carefully. Concerns about people being pushed out of Bellevue due to high housing costs or the inability to children to afford to live in the city they grew up were top of mind for many.

People in the events spoke enthusiastically about some of Bellevue’s existing or planned public spaces. The benefits that “third places” like Crossroads Mall bring to a community are something people want to see in more areas of the city. Along these lines, people expressed a desire to see more locally owned, small businesses throughout the city; these are the kinds of businesses that can give a unique flavor to a neighborhood and make accessing goods and services easier.

Access and mobility were other big topics with people expressing a desire for more walkable neighborhoods, investment in transit and planning ahead for new transportation options like autonomous vehicles.

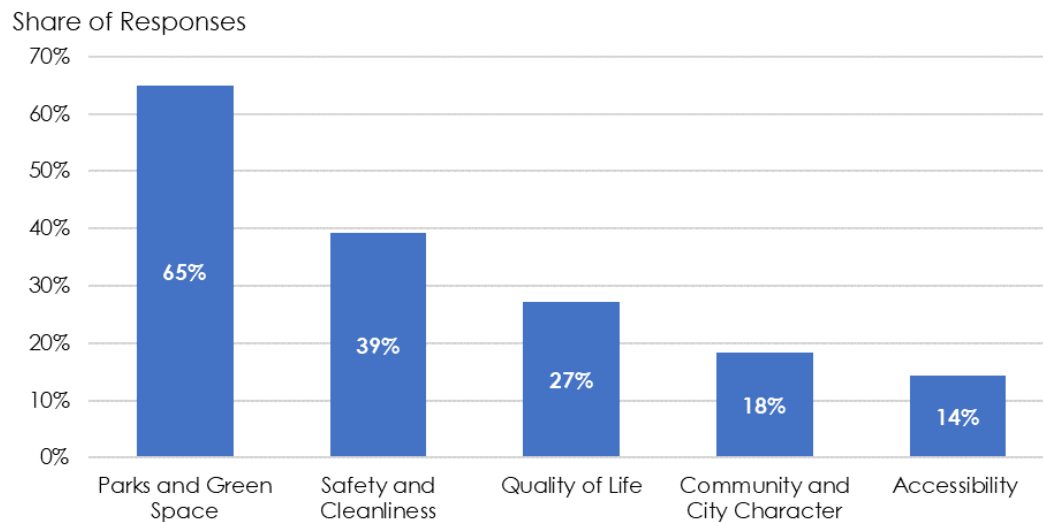
Questionnaire

The Bellevue 2044 Vision Questionnaire was the primary method of gathering input. It consisted of two open ended questions that invited people to share what they love about the city and what their chief concerns are; a Likert scale question that asked people to rate the city’s performance on achieving the adopted City Council vision; and a short word association question that gathered respondents’ general impressions of Bellevue today.

3,326 individuals submitted responses via mail, at community events, or online. Though this is not a statistically valid sample due to the self-selection bias described above, the number of responses does provide valuable insight into the community’s perspective of the city and the issues that are top of mind for many people.

Open Ended Questions

The first open ended question asked people, **“What is something you love about Bellevue that you want future generations to enjoy?”** By far, the thing that people value most about the city are the parks, trees, and green spaces; people appreciate the formal parks that offer recreation and an opportunity to enjoy nature as well as the “city in a park” feel that the many street and neighborhood trees provide. Other major themes that came up in the responses were safety and cleanliness; quality of life; sense of community; and convenient access to jobs, services, and other amenities.



Source: City of Bellevue Vision Questionnaire, 2022; Community Attributes, 2022.

The second open ended question focused on concerns and asked people, **“What is the most important challenge Bellevue should address to make sure future generations can thrive?”** Issues related to housing choice, housing type, and housing affordability were the most common topics raised. In addition to broadly calling for more affordable housing options, many respondents specifically cited the need for affordable housing for low- and middle-income households, seniors, service industry workers, and the young people who are just starting out.

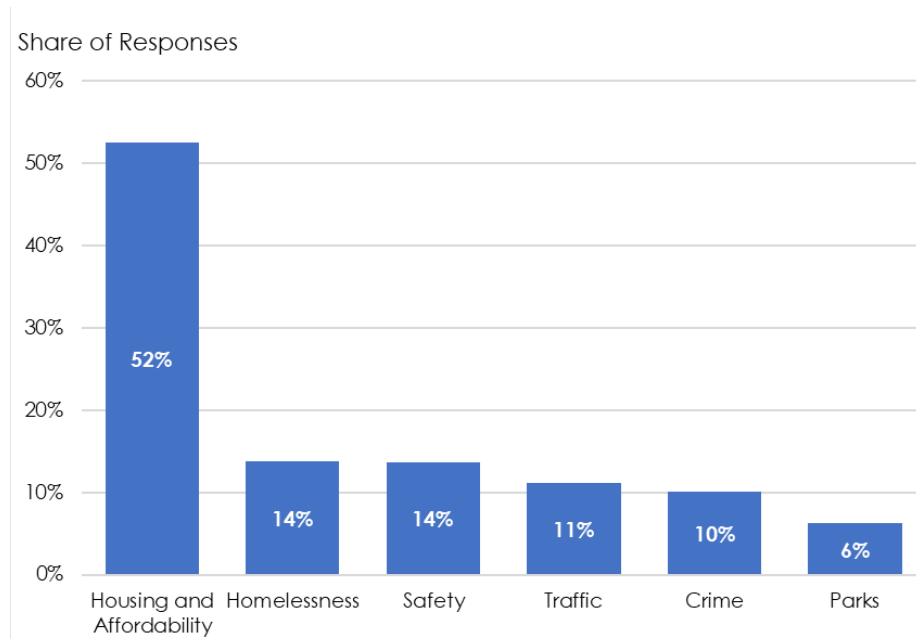
How and where to provide more housing will be a central question to the Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update, and on this issue the questionnaire revealed noteworthy differences of opinion with some respondents calling for more density and more housing options and others who do not want to see additional growth within the city.

Related to affordable housing, were concerns raised about homelessness with respondents divided in calling for more removal of encampments and more investment in mental health, substance abuse, and other social services for people experiencing homelessness.

Traffic was another major concern raised by respondents. Answers related to traffic most often cited the challenge of overall car traffic or how the amount of traffic impacts safety and usability for bicycling and walking.

Crime and safety were other prominent themes in the responses related to challenges facing the city. Answers relating to crime and safety covered issues such as property theft, drug use, personal safety as well as calls for infrastructure to support pedestrian and cyclist safety.

Finally, many people expressed concern about the loss of trees or the impacts to parks and open space due to growth.

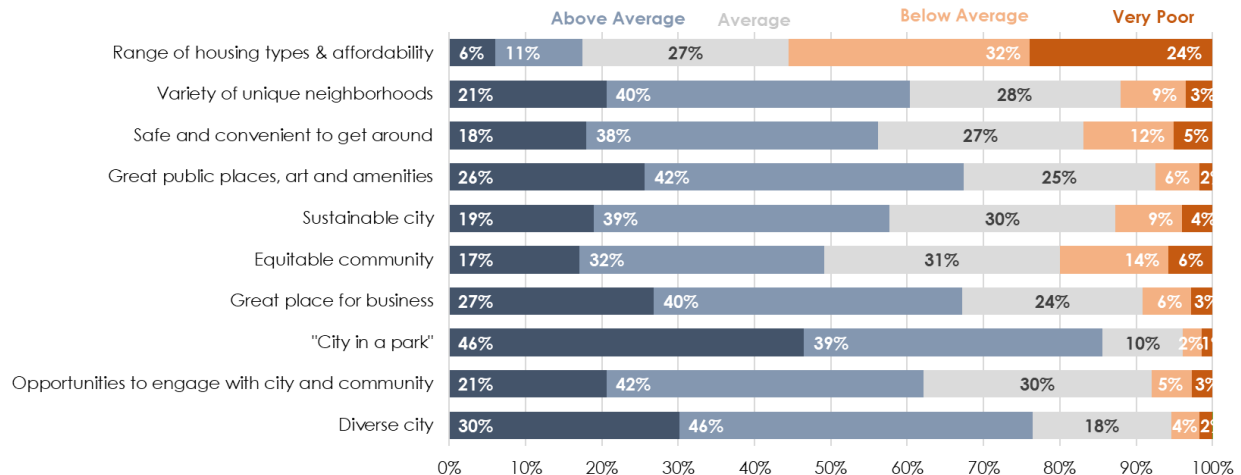


Source: City of Bellevue Vision Questionnaire, 2022; Community Attributes, 2022.

City's Vision

The third question took the City Council's Vision, as unanimously reaffirmed in 2021, and asked respondents to rate the city's progress in achieving each part of the vision. The full text of each area they were asked to rate included the following:

- We offer a range of housing types and people can find something that is affordable for their family to rent or own.
- We have a variety of unique neighborhoods that are safe and inclusive. People have places to gather and can easily get to shops, cafes, and other amenities.
- We make it safe and convenient for people to get around the city and region by car, transit, biking, and walking.
- We have great public spaces, art, and amenities that bring people together.
- We are a sustainable city that cares about the environment and addressing climate change.
- We are an equitable community where everyone has an opportunity to thrive.
- We are a great place for business that welcomes and supports small business, major employers, and entrepreneurs.
- We are a "City in a Park" where people have access to parks, open space & recreation.
- People in Bellevue have many opportunities to engage with the city and their community.
- We are a diverse city where people feel welcome & included. Cultural diversity is celebrated through the arts, entertainment, business, history, food, and more.



Source: City of Bellevue Vision Questionnaire, 2022; Community Attributes, 2022.

The key strengths and challenges are clear in the chart above, which uses a shortened phrase to reference each of the bullets listed above in full.

Respondents rated the city highest in ensuring people have access to parks, open space, and recreation. The city also rated highly in being a diverse and welcoming community; a great place for businesses; presence of great public spaces, arts, and amenities. Half of respondents rate the city as performing below average or poorly in providing a range of housing options that are affordable for people to rent or own. A significant percentage of people gave the city low marks for realizing its vision of being an equitable community where everyone has the opportunity to thrive.

Further analysis of the questionnaire responses does show some significant differences based on key demographics

- Younger residents, born in the 1990s, rated the city lower on realizing its vision as a diverse city and equitable community where everyone has the opportunity to thrive. This demographic also gave the city lower ratings around sustainability, being a great place for business, and providing great public spaces and amenities.
- Compared to Asian and White respondents, Hispanic respondents rated the city lower on realizing its vision as a diverse and welcoming community.
- There is also a significant difference of opinion between renters and homeowners in how well the city is doing to provide a range of housing options that people can afford. 69% of renters indicated that the city is performing below average or very poor compared to 53% of homeowners.

Taking the Community’s Pulse

The final question asked respondents, “**What are three words you would use to describe Bellevue?**” This question was used to understand how the community feels about Bellevue today. This question captured both positive and negative feelings about the city. Here respondents frequently brought up the beauty and safety of the city while expressing concerns about the rising cost of living.



Source: City of Bellevue Vision Questionnaire, 2022; Community Attributes, 2022.

How this input will be used

Bellevue is fortunate to have such an active and engaged community. It is clear there is a high-level of interest in the Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update and that many people care about the future of Bellevue. The input gathered in this first phase of engagement will be used to shape Phase 2, where the community will have the opportunity to dig into the concerns that have been raised in the questionnaire. Through series of Community Deep Dives, Bellevue residents will consider how the city can support sustainable growth, build more connected communities, further our work on creating more walkable, transit-oriented neighborhoods, and providing housing options that meet the needs of people at all stages of life from all backgrounds and income levels.