

Attachment B – Summary of Community Feedback

There are three primary areas of needed changes to the Comprehensive Plan during this periodic update due to changes in state law and amendments to the Multicounty Planning Policies (MPPs), adopted by Puget Sound Regional Council as a part of Vision 2050, and Countywide Planning Policies (CPPs), adopted by King County and ratified by cities in King County, including Bellevue. These three areas are,

Equity: Recent changes to the Growth Management Act have added requirements to plan for housing for households at all income levels and addressing systemic racism and exclusion through policy updates. Updates to the Multicounty Planning Policies (MPPs) and Countywide Planning Policies (CPPs) emphasize planning for the most vulnerable groups.

Housing: Recent changes to the Growth Management Act have added requirements to plan for a variety of housing types, including duplexes, triplexes, and other middle density housing types. The housing element of the CPPs was substantially updated to center equity in the policies for housing production.

Climate Change: The MPPs have been updated to emphasize the importance of responding to the causes and impacts of climate change.

The following is a summary of the input from the community to the city through the full range of engagement opportunities the city created around these three topics.

Equity

At one of the Vision Events, community members contributed to a “vision board” with pictures, drawings, and words. The effect was a city close to nature with people from all walks of life enjoying themselves walking, picnicking, and playing. This vision has been repeated through many forms of engagement but not everyone feels the city is excelling in creating an equitable environment for everyone. Several factors have surfaced in the information the city has received through community engagement, including:

- Access to housing is out of reach for many people.
- Spanish is the second most-spoken non-English language spoken in Bellevue yet often not a focus of outreach and services.
- The poorest residents are often overlooked in the city.

Housing for all income levels was the eighth priority (out of 10) across all residents on the Statistically Valid Survey. However, among those with less access to housing, it is a higher priority. For people under 40 years old, it is the fourth or fifth priority. For people with annual household incomes below \$50,000, it is the top priority and for people with annual household incomes below \$100,000, it is the third priority. The biggest supporters of housing for people of all incomes are renters. For renters, this priority is second only to homeownership opportunities, suggesting access to housing is more important than any other city priority for

renters. In the Vision Survey, very few respondents felt that Bellevue was doing a good job providing “a range of housing types and people can find something that is affordable for their family to rent or own.” In fact, 55 percent felt Bellevue was doing a below average or poor job of offering that.

Housing for people of all income levels in Bellevue is an equity issue because it disproportionately impacts certain groups. We have heard from older residents that they are being priced out of their homes they own because of tax increases. Other seniors looking to downsize have a hard time finding a place to move to in their neighborhood. One resident related their “Housing Story” on Engaging Bellevue,

“Over six years ago I began search for smaller home to downsize to after my spouse's death. I have now adjusted my home search for housing outside Bellevue and am looking at senior housing - cottage like or larger condo/apartments with a garage (I hope) but am angry that I must leave Bellevue to find it.”

People on fixed incomes because of age, disability or other factors find they cannot make ends meet in Bellevue. However, families find the city attractive because of the schools and parks. At a meeting with Bellevue School District Family Connection Staff, we heard that families are doubling up or staying in substandard housing to keep their children in the same school, an element of stability in a child's life. This intersects with race because people experiencing homelessness in King County are disproportionately people of color, especially people who identify as Hispanic, Black, and Native.¹

Of all respondents to the Vision Survey, 49 percent said that the city was doing an excellent or above average job at creating “an equitable community where everyone has an opportunity to thrive.” While Asian respondents were mostly likely to say this (60 percent said the city was doing an excellent or above average job), Hispanic respondents were most likely to say that the city was doing below average or poorly at creating an equitable community (32 percent).

Bellevue has one of the highest median income levels in the region but about a fifth of households have less than \$50,000 annually.² The people in these households often do not have the resources to easily live in Bellevue. Staff spoke with people in this group by reaching out to specific organizations that represent their interests. In our conversation with clients and staff at Mary's Place we heard that families want to stay in Bellevue so that their children can remain in the same school and maintain that stability while other aspects of their lives are changing. However, it is very difficult to find enough housing in Bellevue to serve the needs of all of the

¹ King County Regional Homelessness Authority. 2022. Data Overview. <https://kcrha.org/data-overview/>

² American Community Survey. 2021. Table DP03.

people who qualify for housing assistance. Family Connection staff at the Bellevue School District confirmed this is true for many families in the district.

Building housing to meet the needs of households with the lowest incomes can be difficult. At a Strategy Team meeting, several representatives of developer interests and nonprofit affordable housing providers noted that the only way to construct housing that is affordable to the lowest income households is for there to be a subsidy program. It is not possible to achieve this through an incentive system. Yet the need for housing among those least able to afford it is great.

Housing

Housing is repeatedly raised as the primary area of concern for most residents. When looking for a place to live, the style of housing in the neighborhood is the primary consideration for most residents according to the Statistically Valid Survey. About two-thirds of residents would prefer a neighborhood other than an exclusively single-family area even though most residential land in Bellevue is zoned for single-family. This indicates that there is a need to support additional styles of housing in the city and provide diverse neighborhood environments. The survey supported issues that have been surfacing in many of the engagement activities, including:

- Bellevue needs many different neighborhoods to meet the needs of people at all stages of life.
- Supporting homeownership for first-time home buyers and others with less means is important.
- Some places in Bellevue are more suited for middle density housing than others.

The Statistically Valid Survey asked people to identify the characteristics of their preferred neighborhood through an exercise where they chose neighborhoods that had different characteristics like single-family homes, ability to walk to shops, or large parks within driving distance. The results of the preference exercise is a clear demonstration that there is not one neighborhood that will meet the needs and preferences of all people. For some people a single-family neighborhood, distant from businesses is the ideal, while for others, a neighborhood with a mix of townhomes, apartments and businesses is ideal. Adding housing capacity in and around Neighborhood Centers was identified by one participant at the Deep Dive on the Environment as a way to achieve a variety of interesting and unique places in Bellevue. “More density means more chances to experiment with styles of neighborhood character.”

At a Strategy Team meeting one of the neighborhood representatives identified a desire for mixed income neighborhoods. They said this would mean that some housing is prevented from getting torn down and replaced by a large home, but also more housing of different types is built, such as single-level housing for seniors, or townhomes for families. We have heard at nearly every event that residents do not like large homes replacing smaller homes. Some do not

like it because it often means removing trees and a smaller yard. Others do not like it because it removes a less-expensive house and replaces it with a house that is out of the reach of the vast majority of people in Puget Sound. One respondent to the Vision Survey said, “New development should be required to be in harmony with neighborhoods - e.g. tree preservation, no huge single family homes ('mansions') that dominate the surrounding neighborhood.”

The ability of people to afford to buy homes in Bellevue is important to many residents. For people with household incomes under \$200,000, homeownership for households at different incomes was the top priority. This indicates that even for households making well above the median income, homeownership in Bellevue is uncertain. Homeownership for households of different incomes is also the top priority for people between 30 and 56, though it drops to sixth for people over 75 years old.

Affordability of homeownership is a theme that resurfaces continually. At one of the Housing Forums, one group discussed the desire for more income diversity in neighborhoods but with a focus on homeownership. They noted that this would mean that there would need to be a much wider diversity of housing so that there could be more entry points to homeownership in Bellevue. The theme that ran through many of the discussions at the Housing Forum and in conversations at other events was how to support a community that is inclusive and promotes inter-personal connection.

At the Deep Dive event that focused on Housing, people identified our Mixed Use Centers, especially BelRed and Eastgate as the most preferred sites for more housing. People at that event identified more dense missing middle housing types such as townhomes and small apartment buildings are most appropriate near transit and near the city’s Neighborhood Centers – those small commercial areas in primarily residential places in the city. The less dense styles, such as duplexes or triplexes were identified as good fits in most places of the city. The Statistically Valid Survey showed that about 67 percent of residents support middle housing styles across the city, however, not everyone thought that it was appropriate in their neighborhood. Residents with the most support for additional housing of any type in their neighborhood live in BelRed (100 percent), Bridle Trails (63 percent), Crossroads (83 percent), Downtown (79 percent), and Wilburton (63 percent).

Residents are most skeptical of adding housing capacity in areas that are currently exclusively single-family and along arterials. In the Deep Dive focusing on Housing, almost nobody identified areas in the Cougar Mountain / Lakemont neighborhood as good places for more housing. At one of the Housing Forum events, one group noted that adding density to single-family areas will require a shift in how people think about their neighborhood. People at the Deep Dive on the Environment saw the incorporation low density housing option in areas that are currently exclusively single-family as an opportunity for intergenerational living, a means to improve affordability, and an equitable way to distribute growth.

Middle housing is a concept that is new to many people in Bellevue. At the Deep Dive focused on Housing, townhomes had the most support as a style of middle housing but that may be because it is one of the most well-understood styles of housing since it already exists in Bellevue. Styles that are not in Bellevue, such as cottage housing, garnered many questions. Many people expressed a desire for new housing of any type to fit in with the existing neighborhood. According to the Statistically Valid Survey, preserving the size and scale of existing neighborhoods was most important to people age 57 and older. Among those younger it was a very low priority and did not rank at all for those under 30. Preserving the size and scale of neighborhoods is also more important to people living in single-family homes than in multi-family homes. However, it is more important to households without children than for those with children, which may be counterintuitive.

Climate Change

Across all demographics, people value the forested appearance of Bellevue. In the Statistically Valid Survey, preserving and enhancing the tree canopy is in the top 5 priorities for most demographic groups. It is the top priority for people in Eastgate, Northeast Bellevue, Somerset, and West Lake Sammamish neighborhoods. The tree canopy has been raised at every event the city has hosted with the public. However, concerns about climate change are not exclusive to the tree canopy. People have expressed a variety of concerns about the city's response to climate change, including:

- Preserving the tree canopy is important for aesthetic and health reasons.
- Reducing greenhouse gas emissions should be a focus of city policy.
- Supporting the safety of people walking, biking and using transit is needed.

Without a doubt, Bellevue's "City in a Park" feel is one of the primary things people value about Bellevue. The trees and tree canopy are an important part of that. Many people expressed concern that adding a lot of capacity for housing would have a negative impact on the tree canopy. At the Deep Dive on the Environment, residents cited "less green space" and "lower tree canopy potential" as reasons not to have the highest housing capacity. However, others at the same event said that it could increase the tree canopy if the growth were concentrated in a few places and adding a lot of capacity could reduce the pressure to develop on the margins of the region resulting in a positive impact for the tree canopy across the region.

At the Strategy Team meetings, representatives of development companies expressed a need to find a balance in the tree code that would allow for both tree retention and development of more dense housing solutions. Strategy Team members suggested incentivizing green roofs and replanting of native trees or trees with large canopies and recognizing that tree canopy growth happens in the timeframe of tree growth. At the Housing Forums, people said that they were concerned that park land be acquired, and parks be created at the same rate as housing to support the increased demand for recreational spaces and community health.

Most people in Bellevue drive for most purposes outside their homes. At the Deep Dive on Access, the city asked people about the challenges they face getting around the city. Some participants responded that they do not have challenges because they use their cars. As one participant wrote, “I drive everywhere. Walking takes way too long. Car is so much easier!!!” although traffic congestion was also cited as a challenge.

There is a recognition by many people who have participated in events or given feedback in other ways that while traveling in a personal vehicle is still dominant, focusing solely on the efficiency of car travel is not ideal. One respondent to the Vision Survey said, “I think making the city more walkable would be huge. There is a lot of congestion and aggressive driving that make it feel very unsafe.” At the Deep Dive on Access, community suggested solutions to the challenges identified by people relating to infrequent bus service or lack of infrastructure for walking and biking included adding more housing around specific nodes in neighborhoods that have a lot of basic services.

Many people who have participated in events have emphasized the need to lower greenhouse gas emissions. In response to the question on the Vision Survey about what people would like to change, respondents wrote things like, “Climate change! We need to work on lowering GHG emissions,” and “Act quickly and decisively to curb GHG emissions so Climate impacts will not get much worse.” At the Deep Dive on the Environment, support for allowing more housing along arterials was mixed. Reasons not to allow apartment buildings and other denser housing types along arterials included poor air quality for residents and safety for pedestrians and bicyclists. There is concern about the energy impact of buildings as well. Comments received in response to the Deep Dive on the Environment include concerns that buildings are not doing enough to conserve energy.

“There should be mandatory requirements in place today that insist that developers investment a significant percentage of the build cost into sustainable products such as solar panels, solar windows, recycled water systems, etc. that assist the city and our environment in maintaining the quality of area. ...This should help reduce the exponential growth on the local utilities and most people want to live in these more efficient residences, it is part of the reason we live here.”

According to the results of the Statistically Valid Survey, 56 percent of residents walk, bike, or access a park or trail in their neighborhood once a week or more. At the Deep Dive event on Connection, many people said they would like to walk or bike but they have concerns about safety. As one participant expressed at the Deep Dive on Access,

“Except for fun or exercise, we have to drive almost everywhere....Our electric bikes help a little, but we are worried about our safety on the roads with cars. We are encouraged by new bike trails (Eastrail), but it's really not enough.”

Safety was one of the major themes on the Vision Survey. “Safe” is one of the top three words that people use to describe Bellevue and yet, it was also an area where people would like to see

improvement. People want to be safe from property crime and to feel safe when they are on the street. In response to the question on the Vision Survey about what people would like to see change in Bellevue, comments such as, “[reduce] crime in public areas (parks, transit centers),” and “safety. walking / biking friendly road,” were common.