



Bellevue Planning Commission

March 13, 2024

PLANNING COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM

SUBJECT

Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update: Staff Recommended Policy Changes in Neighborhoods, Climate & Environment, and Parks, Recreation & Open Space Elements

STAFF CONTACTS

Emil A. King, AICP, Planning Director, 452-7223
Thara Johnson, Comprehensive Planning Manager, 452-4087
Kate Nesse, PhD, Senior Planner, 452-2042
Community Development Department

POLICY ISSUES

Bellevue's Comprehensive Plan provides the roadmap for growth in the City. This memo focuses on staff-recommended updates to policies in the following elements:

- Neighborhoods
- Climate & Environment
- Parks, Recreation & Open Space

DIRECTION NEEDED FROM THE PLANNING COMMISSION

ACTION

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DIRECTION

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INFORMATION ONLY

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BACKGROUND

Washington State's Growth Management Act (GMA) directs cities and counties to update their comprehensive plans every 10 years (RCW 36.70A). The current update must be adopted by December 31, 2024. Bellevue's Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update was launched February 28, 2022, and has included extensive public engagement. A summary of Planning Commission's past and future Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update topics addressed at Planning Commission meetings is in Attachment A.

At this meeting, the Commission will review staff-recommended updates to the policies based on Commission feedback, community engagement to date, potential mitigation measures and other recommendations in the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and study documents, and state and regional requirements. The Comprehensive Plan addresses programs, activities

and initiatives of citywide scope, therefore the plan update has been heavily coordinated across departments. Several boards and commissions have reviewed staff recommended policy updates to elements, according to their area of expertise. The Parks and Community Services Board reviewed changes to the Parks, Recreation and Open Space element policies and recommended the policy updates as included in Attachment B.

The City engaged with the community about the updates to the policies through a survey, two in-person events and visits to local middle and high schools. The results of this engagement are discussed in the sections below for each element. The comments are grouped by element (Attachments D, E, & F) with youth comments all together because their comments were not specific to each element but touched on issues across elements (Attachment G). A summary of the engagement in Phase 3 is also included (Attachment H) which provides an overview of the major themes heard through the various engagement efforts.

NEIGHBORHOODS ELEMENT

The Neighborhoods element contains policies that support safe and inclusive interactions between people in Bellevue. Throughout the engagement with the community, staff heard that people would like more policies related to safety. The Neighborhoods element was expanded to include a new section, entitled, “Community Safety”. This new section includes the existing policy supporting community safety through Bellevue’s Police and Fire departments, an update to a policy on emergency preparedness, and two new policies, one on increasing firearm safety and one on deterring racially-motivated hate crimes. The feedback from the community about the policy moves through the survey and in-person events was supportive of these changes. In addition, the feedback indicated general support for building community cohesion within neighborhoods.

It is clear from the community feedback that people define the distinguishing characteristics of their neighborhoods differently. While there was support for being more specific in the policies about what neighborhood character means, respondents disagreed about what those specifics should be. Some people felt the thing that distinguished their neighborhood was the style of housing (for example, small, detached homes), while others felt it was the people that were in the homes (for example, first-time home-buyers and seniors). Others identified trees, or the presence or lack sidewalks, or access to the area as the characteristic that makes their neighborhood special.

When asked what they would like Planning Commissioners to consider as they discuss the updates to the policies, many people said they would like the commissioners to consider what people like them want for the future of the City. This type of comment came from people of many different backgrounds and in different parts of the city with different desires for the future of Bellevue. In addition, respondents asked commissioners to consider the types of housing available in different neighborhoods. Some community members want commissioners

to not allow changes to housing in neighborhoods while others want commissioners to consider how more housing that is affordable to middle income buyers can be created. All of the comments are included in Attachment D.

The feedback through the survey was in line with what has been communicated throughout the process. Staff have responded to this feedback by recommending the additional safety policies and safety section, by being more specific about neighborhood character in the policies, and by including policies that support community connection, a range of housing types in every neighborhood and equitable access to neighborhood services. One area that came up in the feedback is equitable access.

Several people would like to see less reference to equity in the policies. The addition of equity considerations in the Neighborhoods element and throughout the Comprehensive Plan stems from three places. First, at the launch of the Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update, council directed staff to “include policies that address the legacy of discrimination”. A primary way to address this is to increase equitable access services and locations. Second, one of the major areas of updates to the King County Countywide Planning Policies (CPPs) were updates that promote equity. Since Bellevue’s plan needs to be consistent with the CPPs, that is also an area where Bellevue updated many policies. Finally, the City’s Racially Disparate Impact Analysis, a report that was done to meet state requirements under HB 1220, identified several existing policies that could impact some racial groups negatively. Staff do not recommend any further changes to policies regarding equity but suggest that the plan narrative preceding the policies could include some additional description of why equity is important to Bellevue.

Below, the policy updates in the Neighborhoods (NH) element are listed by subsection, highlighting the main changes in the subsection. Changes that are a clarification or a grammatical change are not included below. Attachment B contains the strike/underline of all policy changes in this element, including minor edits that are not highlighted in this memo.

Neighborhood Core Needs

- NH-2. Added to support middle housing, parks and Neighborhood Centers in all neighborhoods.
- NH-3. Added climate-related hazards to consider for emergency preparation based on a recommendation from Climate Vulnerability Assessment.
- NH-4. Added to address new CPP policy, CPP-DP-8 about increasing equitable access to healthy food.
- NH-6. Added to support initiatives to expand belonging in the city based on a recommendation from Centering Communities of Color community dialog.

Community Safety

- NH-12. Added to support gun safety.

- NH-13. Added to deter racism and racially-motivated hate crimes based on a recommendation from Centering Communities of Color community dialog.

Inclusive Neighborhood Identity

- NH-14. Updated to include a more specific description of the character to be enhanced in Bellevue neighborhoods.

Neighborhood Area Planning

- NH-16. Updated to better reflect Neighborhood Area Plans' relationship to the Comprehensive Plan.

CLIMATE & ENVIRONMENT ELEMENT

The Climate & Environment element contains policies about how the City addresses climate change, promotes sustainable development, and restores, protects, and enhances Bellevue's ecosystems on public lands, like parks, and on private property. The vast majority of respondents to the survey and in-person meetings were supportive of the updates to the Climate & Environment element policies. This is consistent with what has been heard throughout the process. This has included the importance of tree canopy in nearly every survey and event. In the statistically valid survey, respondents ranked "preserve and enhance the tree canopy" second only to "home ownership opportunities for people with different incomes". In the survey of policy updates, there was strong support for policies that forward this objective, although some respondents said that the preservation of trees should not overshadow other environmental actions like encouraging transit use and encouraging housing density. Respondents also voiced strong support for policies that support actions to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

The most prominent area identified as "missing" by respondents to the survey and in-person events was including targets for GHG reduction or other activities. Policy CL-15 includes a target of a minimum of 40 percent tree canopy coverage, a target that is recommended to remain the same. Policy CL-12 includes targets for GHG emission reductions. However, for most targets, staff feel it is best to set those in the Environmental Stewardship Plan where fuller description and nuance can be included and where the targets can be reassessed more frequently. The Environmental Stewardship Plan provides specific directions and strategies to address climate change and sustainability and is also updated on a five year cycle.

There were many respondents who wanted more policies to reduce roads, make them serve more users, such as bicyclists and walkers, or increase transit. While the Climate & Environment element does address vehicles as they relate to GHG emissions (CL-11), most transportation policies are in the Transportation element, though they can have a considerable impact on the environment. In the final update to the Comprehensive Plan, staff plan to include notes that

reference related policies in other elements so people can easily find related policies. There is an opportunity to add a note near this policy referring to policies in the Transportation element that aim to reduce driving alone. Finally, several respondents asked the City to take a harder line with Puget Sound Energy (PSE) to require them to use certain processes or not use certain fuels. While the City does have policies in the Utilities element around working with PSE to serve Bellevue residents and businesses well, there are limits to what the City can require of partner organizations.

Many respondents asked the City to consider the causes and impacts of climate change when discussing the updates to the policies. Some respondents asked for more development density while others asked for less density, both believing that the result will benefit the environment. Many people also asked commissioners to consider the impacts of future development to the livability of Bellevue. All comments are in Appendix E.

Staff do not recommend any further changes to the policies in the public review draft at this time. The comments on the policy updates were in line with comments received throughout the process however, there were a few specific comments that staff are following up on with subject matter experts to thoroughly consider before proposing additional changes.

Below, the policy updates in the Climate & Environment (CL) element are listed by subsection, highlighting the main changes in that subsection. Changes that are a clarification or a grammatical change are not included below. Attachment B contains the strike/underline of all policy changes in this element, including minor edits that are not highlighted in this memo.

Environmental Stewardship

- CL-5. Updated to use more current and encompassing language and address the new CPP policy CPP-EN-2.
- CL-7. Updated to include a standard climate accounting framework to measure GHG emissions and include a broader array of city activities.
- CL-9. Added to address environmental disparities and the new CPP policy, CPP-EN-25.
- CL-10. Added to support environmental education (moved from BelRed Subarea Plan).

Greenhouse Gas Emission Reduction

- CL-11. Added to support the transition to more sustainable energy sources.
- CL-12. Updated to reflect new GHG emission reduction goals and CPP policy CPP-EN-27.
- CL-13. Added to support the consideration of climate change, a recommendation from Climate Vulnerability Assessment.
- CL-14. Added to continue to support the city leading by example.

Urban Forestry

- CL-17, 18, & 19. Added to support tree health and tree canopy and CPP policy CPP-EN-32.
- CL-20 & 22. Added to support tree health and tree canopy and CPP policy CPP-EN-11.
- CL-21. Added to support the consideration of climate change on urban trees.

Climate Resiliency

- CL-24. Added to support the conversion to electricity for buildings and vehicles.
- CL-25. Added to prepare for impacts of climate change and extreme precipitation on stormwater.

Waste and Materials Management

- CL-26. Updated to include a goal and reference the Environmental Stewardship Plan for actions.
- CL-27. Updated to include a characterization of products to prioritize and support for circular economy programs.
- CL-31. Added Environmental Stewardship Plan action W.2.1.

Water Resources

- CL-32. Updated to add consideration for ecosystem services and support CPP policy CPP-EN-18.

Geo Hazards

- CL-43. Updated to include city approvals for vegetation removal in connection with development projects.
- CL-51 & 52. Updated to be consistent with the Growth Management Act and geologic hazard areas critical areas protection.
- CL-57. Added to include climate change impacts related to geologic hazards.

Sustainable Development

- CL-61. Added policy based on Environmental Stewardship Plan Action N.3.1.
- CL-64. Updated to include climate resilience based on a recommendation in the Climate Vulnerability Assessment.
- CL-65, 66, 67, & 68. Added to support greenhouse gas reduction targets (see CL-11).

Air Quality

- CL-69. Updated to include climate change.

Fish and Wildlife Habitat

- CL-77. Updated to include climate resilience as a consideration.
- CL-81. Updated to combine CL-81 and (old number (EN-64) and respond to climate change impacts.
- CL-86 & 88. Updated to include climate resiliency as a consideration.
- CL-90. Updated to improve habitat quality based on a recommendation in the Climate Vulnerability Assessment.

Critical Areas

- CL-99. Updated to align with Growth Management Act and specify geologically hazardous areas protection.
- CL-100. Added to support a target of no net loss of ecosystem based on a recommendation in the Climate Vulnerability Assessment.
- CL-109. Added to support evaluation of ecosystem services during development.

Noise

- CL-113. Updated to include air pollution based on a mitigation measure in DEIS.

PARKS, RECREATION & OPEN SPACE ELEMENT

The Parks & Community Services Board has been engaged in the update of policies in the Parks, Recreation & Open Space element since the launch of the Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update. Staff has met with the board four times to discuss the update as outlined below:

- April 20, 2022: Introduced to the overall scope of the update and their role in reviewing the policies in the Parks, Recreation & Open Space element
- November 8, 2022: Reviewed and provided feedback on the scope of the updates in the Parks, Recreation & Open Space element policies
- January 9, 2024: Reviewed specific changes to the policies and provided feedback and suggested changes to the policy updates.
- February 13, 2024: Reviewed final changes to the policy updates and made a recommendation to the Planning Commission.

The Parks & Community Services Board brought their expertise on the range of planning for parks and recreation in Bellevue that they are involved in from updating functional plans, such as the recently updated Parks & Open Space System Plan, to specific project review, including proposed park master plans. The Board heard a partial summary of the feedback from the community at their meeting (all the feedback that had been submitted related to the element as of February 13).

At its February 13 meeting the Parks and Community Services Board unanimously recommended the amendments to the Parks Recreation and Open Space element policies to the Planning Commission as part of the periodic update to the Comprehensive Plan.

The feedback received through the survey and in-person engagement events generally support the updates to the Comprehensive Plan policies in the Parks, Recreation & Open Space element. Respondents were especially supportive of the changes that enhance the ecological function of parks and increasing access to parks. People were supportive of increasing access geographically by focusing park acquisition and development in areas that are currently underserved. People were also supportive of increasing equitable access by designing park facilities, from playgrounds to paths to buildings and recreational programming, to meet the needs of a wider variety of people.

The things that respondents noted as missing were primarily focused on the details of park planning, for example, people suggested the use of drought-resistant landscaping or adding dog parks. The drought-resistant landscaping is in line with the update to policy PA-35 and PA-36, however, that level of detail is best addressed through the Parks & Open Space System Plan and programmatically. Similarly, the addition of dog parks is in line with policy PA-16 but best addressed through the Parks & Open Space System Plan and park master plans. There was also interest in promoting safety in parks, which relates to PA-5 and PA-41. The Parks and Community Services Board recommended adding “safe” to PA-14, which is reflected in the policy changes in Appendix B. The Neighborhoods element has a new section focusing on safety. While these policies do not address safety specifically in parks, NH-10 and NH-11 provide support for Bellevue Police and Fire departments to plan for safety across the City, including in parks.

This feedback is broadly consistent with the feedback the City has received regarding parks since the launch of the Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update. The most common concern is that parks are expanded to meet the needs of a growing population, especially in areas that are currently underserved by parks. PA-2 and PA-3 were updated to address this concern. Staff do not recommend further changes to the policies in the Parks, Recreation & Open Space element, however, the feedback may be used to inform future updates to functional plans or programmatic actions. All comments can be found in Attachment F.

Below, the policy updates in the Parks, Recreation & Open Space (PA) element are listed by subsection, highlighting the main changes in that subsection. Changes that are a clarification or a grammatical change are not included below. Attachment B contains the strike/underline of all policy changes in this element, including minor edits that are not highlighted in this memo.

Parks and Open Space

- PA-2. Updated to reference keeping pace with growth and the Parks and Open Space System Plan.
- PA-3. Updated to include consideration for underserved areas and areas experiencing growth.
- PA-4. Added to ensure maximization of space is considered in park development.
- PA-5. Added to support access to parks.
- PA-11. Updated to include details of financing tools.
- PA-13. Updated to clarify that this applies to privately owned and operated facilities. Combined with (old number) PA-14.
- PA-14. Updated to emphasize the safety of the linkages.
- PA-15. Updated to emphasize the role Eastrail plays in the parks system.
- PA-16. Added to include emerging facility needs.
- PA-17. Updated to emphasize community involvement in the planning process.
- PA-19. Added to ensure planning for public gathering spaces.
- PA-20. Added to support development of facilities along the Grand Connection beyond active transportation and linkage to parks.

Recreation and Community Services

- PA-30. Updated to include evaluation and use more specific about why to solicit community feedback.
- PA-31. Updated to include detail on responding to the community's needs in culturally-specific ways.

Stewardship

- PA-33. Added to support ecological management practices.
- PA-35. Added to support tree canopy policies. (see policies CL-15 to CL-22)
- PA-36. Added to support restoration opportunities.
- PA-38. Updated to include climate change based on a recommendation in the Climate Vulnerability Assessment.
- PA-39. Moved from Land Use element. Updated to focus on streetscapes.

Maintenance, Renovation and Redevelopment

- PA-42. Added to direct the city to lead by example in the construction and renovation of buildings to have minimal negative impacts on the environment.
- PA-45. Updated to prevent uses that are not in alignment with the intended or planned use and to better support resolution of property encroachments that can occur over time.

ATTACHMENTS

- A. Planning Commission Meetings and Topics
- B. Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update: Proposed Neighborhoods, Climate & Environment, and Parks, Recreation & Open Space Policies
- C. Glossary
- D. Neighborhoods Element Comments
- E. Climate & Environment Element Comments
- F. Parks, Recreation & Open Space Comments
- G. Youth Comments
- H. Phase 3 Engagement Summary