

# Update on Broader Livability Efforts for Downtown Bellevue

May 2015

The current work on updating the Downtown Land Use Code through the Downtown Livability Initiative is part of a broader agenda to make Downtown more people-friendly, vibrant and memorable, and add to the amenities that make for a great city center. This includes a wide variety of new and upcoming projects, programs and events in the following categories that provide on-the-ground examples of how the City and other participants are furthering livability in Downtown Bellevue beyond the Code update.



## Safety and security

Council has set aside funding to begin site selection for a **new Fire Station #10** to serve Downtown and the surrounding area. This

funding will secure land for a facility to provide rapid response for fire and emergency medical calls. The Police Department has a designated **Downtown Policing Squad** comprised of a lieutenant, corporal, and four officers.



## Schools

Over 1,000 children (ages 0-18) are currently living Downtown per City estimate. The City has worked with the Bellevue School District and they

recently identified a site at 124th Ave NE and Main Street for a **new elementary school** to serve the growing number of Downtown families. Anticipating this need, the school was fully funded in the district's 2014 capital construction bond.



## Walkability/ pedestrian comfort

Creating a safer, more convenient and inviting pedestrian environment is a prime goal of the City. Current

projects to improve walkability and implement the Downtown Transportation Plan include:

**enhancing the pedestrian crossing at 108th Ave NE/NE 4th Street; improving the intersections for pedestrians on the south side of Downtown Park; elevating the 106th Ave NE/NE 6th Street intersection** adjacent to Compass Plaza to create a safer raised "table"; and a wider and **gently sloping ramp in the "Garden Hillclimb"** segment of the Pedestrian Corridor. The City is also **following up with improvements for people that are mobility-impaired**. Council provided a dedicated resource in the new Capital Investment Plan adopted in December 2014 for addressing citizen accessibility requests and implementing high priority improvements in the City's ADA Transition Plan.



## Character

One of Council's adopted priorities for 2015-16 referred to as the **Grand Connection** will create major placemaking elements and open space

from Meydenbauer Bay, through Downtown, and across I-405 to the Eastside Rail Corridor trail (old Burlington Northern rail line). Conceptual design work will be proceeding in 2015 on what will become a signature feature for Downtown. The **Old Bellevue identity project** including gateway signage, district markers, and historical utility box wraps was completed in early 2015. A downtown-wide **median study** will prioritize planted median locations that will green the Downtown, aid in pedestrian safety and enhance neighborhood and gateway character. Implementation will take place in coordination with existing and planned transportation improvements.

## Update on Broader Livability Efforts for Downtown Bellevue *(continued)*



### Public transit

Council and the Sound Transit Board recently approved an updated Memorandum of Understanding for the **East Link**

**light rail project.** Light rail is now moving forward with two stations to serve Downtown, at East Main Street and NE 6th Street. In 2023, the system will open with a dedicated guideway to downtown Seattle, Redmond's Overlake District, and the rest of the regional high capacity transit system. Work has been advancing on bus transit as well. The Downtown Transportation Plan identified access improvements and transit route modifications that will provide 97 percent of Downtown residents and employees with a short walk to a transit stop or station. The 108th Ave NE corridor study mentioned above will address transit speed and reliability issues. Work on pedestrian and bicycle facilities at the **Bellevue Transit Center** will help implement the Council direction to provide exceptional access to the Downtown light rail stations.



### Vehicular mobility

A number of street projects are underway or in the works to **improve vehicle access to**

**Downtown.** The new NE 4th Street extension from 116th Ave NE to 120th Ave NE, and the widening of 120th Ave NE, add capacity for traffic entering and exiting Downtown. Both will be completed in 2015. Full funding is now in place for the Spring Boulevard connection between NE 12th Street and 120th Ave NE, which will provide additional capacity at the north end of Downtown. Council also recently approved funding for full design and environmental review of **high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) improvements on Bellevue Way just south of Downtown**, which would add significant capacity to move people during the evening commute period. In the Old Bellevue area, **25 new on-street parking spaces** have been added to support local small businesses, as recommended in the companion Downtown Transportation Plan.



### Bicycle mobility

The Downtown Transportation Plan provides for **enhanced bicycle circulation** both within Downtown and connecting to surrounding

neighborhoods and to regional bicycle facilities along SR 520 and I-90. Projects at 108th Ave/Main Street and NE 8th Street/112th Ave NE will improve safety for people riding bicycles. The City recently installed bicycle wayfinding on 108th Ave NE between Main Street and I-90, and is working with Redmond on **bicycle wayfinding between the downtowns of the two cities.** **A corridor planning effort is about to get underway that will address the multimodal mobility needs for 106th Ave NE, 108th Ave NE and Main Street.**



### Parks and open space

Council approved funding and work is expected to be underway this summer to **complete Downtown Park**, which includes constructing the

remaining portion of the circular water feature and promenade, and completing a "gateway" at the Park's northeast quarter fronting on Bellevue Way. The Rotary Club of Bellevue has partnered with the City to help fund and build **Inspiration Playground** within Downtown Park. It will feature universally accessible design and sensory-rich play experiences suitable for all ages and abilities. Work also continues on the **first phase of Meydenbauer Bay Park**, which will result in a spectacular connection between Downtown and the Lake Washington waterfront.



### Cultural facilities

**KidsQuest Children's Museum** is planning to open their new facility Downtown in the Ashwood Neighborhood in the first half of

2016. A new community-based 3,200 square foot **performing arts venue named Resonance** recently opened in the SOMA Towers, through the efforts of Su Development. **Meydenbauer Convention Center** is scheduled to begin a \$12.5 million renovation in 2015 that will enhance the facility's atmosphere and deliver the latest technology upgrades to support events. **Council recently offered to provide up to \$20 million towards construction of the Tateuchi Center**, a proposed 2,000-seat regional performing arts center. The City's offer is contingent on other non-City funds being raised by September 2016, having a City ownership interest in the facility, and a commitment for 50 years of operation and public programming.



### Affordable/ workforce housing

Downtown is Bellevue's fastest growing neighborhood and the location planned for the largest share

of the City's residential growth. As part of a broader City housing strategy, Bellevue is considering use of a **multifamily tax exemption (MFTE) program** to encourage development of workforce housing in Downtown, Bel-Red, Eastgate, Newport Hills Commercial Area, Crossroads, and Wilburton Commercial. The Low Income Housing Institute (LIHI) recently completed **August Wilson Place**, which adds 57 units of affordable workforce housing to Downtown, including 12 units for homeless people, eight units for veterans, and three units for families with developmental disabilities.



### Entertainment/events

A variety of entities such as the Bellevue Downtown Association, Old Bellevue Merchants

Association, private groups and

sponsors, and the City of Bellevue provide or a wide range of events and entertainment in Downtown. These include the **Bellevue Farmers Market, Bellevue Jazz and Blues Festival, Live at Lunch, Four on the 4th Dog Jog & Walk, ChowDown(town) Food Truck Round-up, and Old Bellevue's Taste of Main.**



### Neighborhood services

To serve the needs of residents living Downtown and the surrounding neighborhoods, a third major grocery store opened in the subarea. **The**

**Asian supermarket Hmart now joins QFC and Safeway in Downtown Bellevue.** In addition, Downtown continues to **evolve with an ever-growing mix of retail, restaurants and coffee shops, and entertainment venues** that offer services to Downtown residents, workers, and nearby neighborhoods as well as the rest of Bellevue and the region.