

UTILITIES ELEMENT SUMMARY

UTILITIES VISION FOR 2035

BELLEVUE HAS THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE UTILITIES THAT MEET THE NEEDS OF A GROWING ECONOMY.

Public and private utilities are building the systems to grow a 21st century economy. These services are resilient, efficient, and available to the entire community. Utilities are sited, designed, and operated in a manner that maintains community character.

MAJOR THEMES & DRIVERS

The Utilities Element works to ensure that utility service continues to address community need, recognizing both anticipated development and changing demand. Utilities includes both city-managed utilities, such as water, waste water, storm water and solid waste, and non-city managed utilities, including electrical, telecommunications and natural gas. The Utilities Element helps ensure coordinated planning between utilities, land use, transportation and other aspects of the city's development. For more detailed inventory and plans of city utilities the Comprehensive Plan links to functional system plans.

While an initial audit of the Utilities Element identified limited need for change to respond to GMA requirements, there has been increased community interest in internet access and the potential impacts of new electrical and wireless facilities over the decade since the last major update. In response to community concerns about new electrical substations, the Utilities Element was updated in 2007-08, along with related code amendments, to address electrical facilities siting. These newer policies continue to play a role in the siting of major facilities, such as transmission lines and seek to avoid and mitigate neighborhood impacts.

As technology becomes ever woven into the fabric of society, community expectations for internet access, speed and electrical reliability have increased. Businesses now see high speed communications access as a basic requirement and new telecommunication ventures are seeking to respond to this new demand. Additionally, the community's environmental awareness and interest have been evolving over the last decade with increased interest in alternative energy sources, solar power, energy efficiency and recycling and reducing waste.

SIGNIFICANT CHANGES

City Utilities

Asset Management – New policy UT-X4 emphasizes cost effective management of City utility systems over their lifetime, including planning for renewal and replacement, balancing risk, and maintaining levels of service, and managing rates to distribute costs equitably across generations.

Utility System Functional Plans. New policy UT-X6 provides a clearer link to the City’s utility functional system plans (e.g. Water System Plan, Waste Water System Plan) as the means for ensuring sufficient utility services to meet the community’s needs for the next 20 years.

Additional NPDES Requirements. The 2013-2018 NPDES (National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System) permit requires that low impact development be the preferred and commonly-used approach to site development. This requirement is largely addressed in the Environment Element as well as in Transportation, Parks and Community Service, and Urban Design & the Arts. New policy UT-X7 supports use of low impact development techniques in infrastructure projects and UT-X11 recognizes that low impact development may result in reduced need for or smaller traditional stormwater facilities.

Non-City Utilities

Telecommunications Access. Consistent with community interest in enhanced internet access, potential policy changes encourage widespread, affordable, high-speed internet access, including access to competing telecommunications services and new forms of technology to provide the community with choice and to facilitate innovation. New policy UT-X2 encourages public/private partnerships that take advantage of the city’s fiber optic network to enhance broadband deployment in the City. New policy UT-X14 states:

UT-X14 Encourage widespread, affordable, high-speed internet access, including access to competing telecommunications services and new forms of technology to provide the community with choice and to facilitate innovation.

UT-X15, X16, and X17 also provide support for increasing widespread internet access, including maintaining Bellevue’s position as a connected community, assessing internet coverage, and providing a balanced permitting process. Change to UT-39 and new Policy UT-X20 allows new aerial communication lines on existing aerial system, provided that they are required to be underground at the time electrical distribution lines are placed underground. In the past, a requirement to underground any new communication lines, even where poles and aerial lines already exist, has been seen as a significant barrier to providing high speed Internet access to some neighborhoods in Bellevue. This significant change would facilitate deployment of new high speed systems that could be attached to existing poles, but would be required to be placed underground when electrical lines are undergrounded.

Electrical Facilities. Recognizing that about half of the city is served with aerial electrical distribution lines, some Bellevue residents continue to seek a path for greater undergrounding. While undergrounding is a complex issue that involves state laws and tariff rules, City policy UT-39 would continue to encourage undergrounding at the time of new development. In addition, new policy UT-X21 provides support for local neighborhood efforts to underground existing lines when a method of neighborhood financing can be identified.

As noted above, past Utilities Element updates added a number of policies that address siting and mitigation of electrical facilities, including substations and transmission lines. UT-72-74 require new facilities consistent with the city's land use pattern, a siting analysis for facilities in sensitive locations, and avoiding, minimizing and mitigating the impacts of new or expanded electrical facilities. UT-X19 adds support for working with the state and utilities to seek sufficient funding to fully mitigate the impacts of new electrical facilities, recognizing that a key barrier to full mitigation is sufficient funding.

Wireless Community Facilities. Recognizing this constantly evolving area, new policy UT-X22 recommends reviewing and updating regulations to respond to continual changes in wireless technology and community conditions.

Regional Utilities. New policy UT-X24 identifies the City's role in regulating aspects of the of Seattle City Light and Olympic Pipeline infrastructure located in Bellevue through applicable permitting and franchise agreement authority.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

- Any questions about what is recommended for change?
- Any additional information needed on this topic?
- Direction on specific changes/refinements to the draft policies?