

Density, Amenities, and Incentive Zoning—Connecting the Dots

For many years, the development of a high density city center has played a central role in Bellevue's growth strategy, as the city has worked to concentrate growth in the Downtown. This has helped take pressure off the city's traditional neighborhoods and created an economic dividend that has benefited the entire city. A key part of this approach has been to ensure that Downtown development is "done right"—that it is of high quality and creates viable, livable, and memorable places. This is captured in the Downtown Subarea Plan as the "Great Place Strategy."

The Plan recognizes that the localized impacts of concentrated development can be significant without careful attention to design and livability features. As densities increase, so does the need to ensure that the quality of design and amenities are sufficient to create livable neighborhoods. When higher density creates conditions for people living and working closely together, it is critical that this is done in a way that creates quality places that are safe, comfortable and inviting. Bellevue's Downtown Subarea Plan and Code have recognized this for many years.

Features linked to higher levels of density include:

- High quality design that is sensitive to its local context and potential impacts on surrounding properties, and adds to the overall quality of the urban experience
- Provision of open spaces that are essential to recreation, health, and enjoyment
- Environmental improvements that mitigate the concentrated use of energy, water and other natural resources; and impacts such as air pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, and the urban heat island effect
- A safe and comfortable pedestrian environment, which includes a rich and inviting public realm
- Provision of public spaces that provide opportunities for community gathering.

Through consideration of such factors, the City is able to work with the development community to ensure that each development addresses its impacts and adds to the whole, helping to create a livable community and contribute to the Great Place Strategy. The Land Use Code helps accomplish this through a variety of tools, including both mandatory requirements and incentive zoning.

Mandatory requirements include the Code standards such as the table of permitted uses, and dimensional standards for features like building setbacks and landscaping widths. Mandatory requirements also include adherence to a set of design guidelines that address urban design considerations. Design guidelines provide clear guidance for design outcomes, while allowing for individual variation among projects, rather than a "one size fits all" prescription.

Incentive zoning is another tool in the Land Use Code, which nests on top of mandatory development requirements. It establishes additional livability expectations that come into play when a development exceeds a base density and height. A menu of options is provided, which gives choice and flexibility for individual developments that graduate to "bonus" levels of density and height, ensuring that each development does its part to address its impacts and create a livable whole.

As the Downtown Livability project proceeds, it will be important to bear in mind the relationship between incentive zoning and other elements of the Code; and of utmost importance, consideration of the kind of community we are striving to create. The diagram below is a simple depiction of these elements.

Land Use Code Elements

