

**CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION**

## Neighborhood Leadership Gathering “Talking about Trees” Report

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**DIRECTION NEEDED FROM COUNCIL****INFORMATION  
ONLY**

Staff will update Council on the recently held Neighborhood Leadership Gathering. Tonight’s update is informational only and no formal action is being requested by Council at this time.

**RECOMMENDATION**

N/A

**BACKGROUND & ANALYSIS**

On February 26 the Neighborhood Outreach team, in partnership with the Environmental Stewardship Initiative, hosted the Neighborhood Leadership Gathering on “Talking about Trees”. Mayor John Chelminiak provided the welcoming remarks and Councilmembers Jennifer Robertson and Janice Zahn were in attendance. Over 80 neighborhood leaders from across Bellevue participated to learn and share how to preserve and grow Bellevue’s tree canopy. This event was the launch of the engagement process for the update to the City’s Environmental Stewardship Initiative Strategic Plan.

The Neighborhood Leadership Gathering is a semi-annual meeting with residents focused on addressing emerging issues or concerns and providing a pathway for two-way communication between the City and residents to share ideas and information. Neighborhood Leadership Gathering are open to all Bellevue residents who care about the quality of life in their neighborhoods.

In February, the Neighborhood Leadership Gathering focused on “Talking about Trees”. Over 80 residents provided input and feedback on how to preserve and grow Bellevue’s tree canopy for future generations. Mark Heilman, Neighborhood Outreach Manager, introduced himself and the Neighborhood Outreach Team. A short video, “Talking about Trees”, provided a brief vignette on the value of Bellevue’s trees in our community. The evening also included a panel presentation by Jennifer Ewing, Environmental Stewardship Program Manager, Matthews Jackson, Neighborhood Development Planning Manager, and Geoff Bradley, Natural Resource Manager. The presentation provided information about Bellevue’s Tree Canopy Assessment and overall trends, trees in our parks, and trees and growth and development. Following these short talks, there was a facilitated discussion of tree-related issues. Residents were asked for their ideas on how the City can partner with the community to preserve and grow Bellevue’s urban tree canopy.

The panel presentation began with the 2017 Urban Tree Canopy Assessment. Key findings include:

- Bellevue has a 37 percent Citywide tree canopy.

- Bellevue has 40 percent impervious surfaces Citywide.
- Within Bellevue parks, there is a significant canopy cover of 65 percent overall.
- The majority of the City's tree canopy is in suburban residential areas, with 65 percent of all canopy. Suburban residential also accounts for the greatest potential for growth of canopy.
- Achieving the 40 percent canopy goal will take time – approximately 670 acres of additional tree canopy is needed to achieve this goal.

The presentation also provided an overview of City codes and regulations that apply to tree removals. More detailed information can be found at <https://development.bellevuewa.gov/zoning-and-land-use/zoning-requirements/trees>.

The Natural Resource division is responsible for managing park natural areas including forests, wetlands, streams and lakes. The Natural Resource Division cares for over 280,000 trees, which protect steep slopes, shade streams, control stormwater, provide homes for wildlife, filter air and water, buffer land uses, and provide ecological connectivity.

Geoff Bradley shared that “All forests are not created equal. Bellevue’s open spaces are not pristine ecosystems, rather lands that have been impacted by human intervention since settlement. The urban forests we inherited are largely composed of canopies of declining short-lived tree species and invasive understories.” Bellevue’s Forest Management programs seeks to:

1. Improve the overall forest condition
2. Accelerate succession
3. Ensure a healthy and sustainable future canopy

The presentation emphasized that stewardship of Bellevue’s tree canopy will require community partnership. In 2018, over 18,000 residents participated in Natural Resource environmental education classes. In addition, over 1,800 volunteers contributed over 7,500 hours helping restore Bellevue’s natural environment.

In 2019, the City is updating Bellevue’s Environmental Stewardship Initiative Strategic Plan. Focus areas of the plan will include; climate change and air quality, mobility and land use, green building, energy and water, materials management and waste, ecosystems, open spaces and stormwater, and trees. More information on the Environmental Stewardship Initiative Strategic Plan Update can be found at [www.bellevuewa.gov/environment](http://www.bellevuewa.gov/environment). Additional resources can be found at [www.bellevuewa.gov/trees](http://www.bellevuewa.gov/trees).

The complete video presentation of the entire meeting can also be found online at the Classes/Events tab for Neighborhood Leadership Gatherings at <https://bellevuewa.gov/city-government/departments/community-development/neighborhoods>.

### **Community Input: Themes**

The Neighborhood Leadership Gathering facilitated questions and answers with the staff panel. The community asked specific questions regarding current City code on tree removal, replacement and restoration. There were additional questions about the enforcement of existing City codes and the need for pragmatic steps and resources to partner with residents and neighborhoods to achieve the City’s tree canopy goal.

At table discussions, neighborhood leaders shared ideas about “how do we preserve and grow our tree

canopy?” The conversation was constructive and insightful and offered a range of practical input. Ideas generated from table discussions included a range of topics from:

- Increasing community education on the value of trees, City regulations
- Additional resources (arborists, vegetation plans, etc.) for residents
- Tree giveaways
- Addressing climate change
- Increased fines or penalties for unpermitted tree cutting
- Better enforcement of current City codes
- Better use of public right of way for tree planting
- Improving partnerships with PSE, Sound Transit, Bellevue Schools on tree planting and preservation
- Strengthening policies and codes to preserve tree canopy

The complete compilation of written comments (see Attachment A) has been shared with the City’s Leadership Team and will provide foundational input for the Environmental Stewardship Initiative Update.

## **POLICY & FISCAL IMPACTS**

### **Policy Impact**

Bellevue is a community of diverse and vibrant neighborhoods. Bellevue residents live in a variety of distinctive, safe and attractive neighborhoods that provide amenities and opportunities for a high quality of life. The Neighborhoods Element within Bellevue’s Comprehensive Plan addresses the importance of working with residents to address emerging issues or concerns, *“By providing clear channels of two-way communication with neighborhoods, the city safeguards against unnecessary disruptions and turmoil, and gains local insight for planning and creative solution-making.”*

N-6. Provide venues for two-way communication with residents to listen to and respond to emerging neighborhood opportunities and concerns.

N-7. Support the capacity of local neighborhood communities to actively engage and respond to changing internal neighborhood needs and external stresses

### **Fiscal Impact**

None

## **OPTIONS**

N/A

## **ATTACHMENTS & AVAILABLE DOCUMENTS**

A. Neighborhood Leadership Gathering: Meeting Minutes

## **AVAILABLE IN COUNCIL LIBRARY**

N/A