

Strategic Plan



**Bellevue Parks &
Community Services**

2020 Edition

BELLEVUE PARKS & COMMUNITY SERVICES STRATEGIC PLAN

February 2020

THE PURPOSE AND VALUE OF PARKS & COMMUNITY SERVICES

Statement from the Parks & Community Services Board

Bellevue Parks & Community Services practices stewardship of natural and cultural resources and promotes well-being through a spectrum of services that support and enrich people’s lives. The health of our park system is closely intertwined with that of the community. Bellevue’s parks, programs, and services are treasured community assets, allowing everyone to gather, play, learn, and develop a relationship with nature. Within a fast-growing city, our parks, open spaces, and trails serve as a reminder of the natural world.

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VISION

In Bellevue everyone can connect to each other and to nature through experiences that help them to live, grow, and thrive.

MISSION

We build a healthy community through an integrated system of exceptional parks, natural areas, recreation, arts and culture, and a broad base of community services.

EQUITY: A SYSTEM OF FAIRNESS

Equity acknowledges and removes disparities in opportunities, power, and resources so that everyone can reach their full potential to thrive. Bellevue Parks & Community Services practices equity, which is the responsibility of every individual in the department. Equitable access is a right, not a privilege, and is fundamental to our mission of serving all people. Through equitable policies and practices, we cultivate ties that connect people to the fabric of our community.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Our Guiding Principles describe the organizational culture associated with an exceptional public service agency as reflected in the City of Bellevue Core Values. These principles are applicable across all functions and remain constant. They unify our diverse and collective set of activities, create a common language for communication, provide a framework for organizational development, and serve as a benchmark for self-assessment.

1) Commit to Excellence

Everyone in Bellevue can enjoy outstanding parks, recreation facilities, and community services because we strive for a culture of excellence, delivering programs and services that are inclusive and accessible. We work with the community to ensure that we are meeting their needs and expectations. We understand that ongoing community collaboration is fundamental to providing excellent service. These high standards and expectations resulted in Parks & Community Services receiving the National Gold Medal Award for Excellence in Park and Recreation Management (2005) and maintaining agency accreditation from the Commission for Accreditation of Parks and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA). Our challenge is to sustain this commitment to excellence and ensure that it carries forward to those who come after us.

2) Be a Learning Organization

Characteristics of a learning organization include curiosity, continuous improvement, creativity, risk-taking, and an entrepreneurial spirit that can challenge the status quo. We have learned that listening to and learning from the community encourages us to be open to change. As individual employees we model these behaviors and as an organization we create an environment that encourages and supports learning.

3) Deliver Highly Relevant and Effective Services

We apply our resources strategically to identify and implement the opportunities that matter most to the community and to enhance the accessibility and cultural responsiveness of programs and services. We achieve positive and demonstrable results in our areas of focus, measured both qualitatively and quantitatively. To succeed we will need appropriate tools to routinely and

accurately monitor the drivers of change within the community and have an organizational culture with the willingness and ability to be nimble and responsive.

4) Achieve a Common Focus Across Diverse Programs and Services

The department combines parks, natural areas, recreation, and arts and culture with community service functions. These community services include adult misdemeanor probation, which provides supportive rehabilitation programs, professional probation services, and electronic monitoring; wraparound services, which builds collaboration and partnerships between public schools, families, students, and the community; and a Human Services division that serves as planner, facilitator, and funder for programs that help individuals and families meet basic human needs. The integration of these functions with traditional park and recreation services creates a rich environment, full of opportunities for collaboration. Bellevue's model of service delivery recognizes that individuals and the physical environment are constantly in motion, at various stages of growth or development. Because of its multidisciplinary structure, the department is able to provide programs and facilities serving this full diversity of human and ecological conditions.

5) Maximize the Value of Resources

We hold public resources in trust and are accountable for utilizing them efficiently, effectively, and equitably. The city cannot and should not assume the sole responsibility to provide for all the needs associated with our mission. We strategically protect and leverage existing resources, preserve assets, seek new partnership opportunities, and encourage others to share the responsibility for our mission of building a healthy and connected community.

6) Apply the One City Philosophy

A high-performance organization focuses on collaboration and achieving results. As a high-performance organization, we are committed to continuous improvement. We also recognize that other department and city services support and advance the mission of Parks & Community Services. The principle of One City requires a broad and holistic community focus. This approach recognizes that for Bellevue residents, service needs are not always neatly contained within the city's operational structure or even within the city. To effectively serve the community we must have a culture that encourages cross-functional communication, shared decision-making, and coordination. To be relevant and effective we must be willing to routinely review service delivery models, align staff and resources, and enable cooperation with shared resources, authority, and accountability.

7) Actively Manage Organizational Health

Our employees are our most valuable resource. Therefore, we must manage our organizational health with as much focus and skill as we do our other resources. We strive for a work environment that is healthy, equitable, and rewarding for every employee, personally and professionally. A well-trained, motivated, and empowered workforce that embodies the principles of exceptional public service is our most effective means to meet the community's expectation for continued excellence.

FOUNDATION FOR A HEALTHY COMMUNITY

We build a healthy community together. Within the context of Bellevue as a whole, Parks & Community Services focuses on parks, natural areas, recreation, arts and culture, adult misdemeanor probation, and human services. The following identifies a set of building blocks that form the foundation for a healthy community. We play a key role in building and sustaining this foundation.

Active minds and healthy lifestyles. Parks & Community Services supports residents in leading a balanced and meaningful life. We enhance the mental and physical well-being of the community through our system of parks and a variety of activities for fitness, personal growth, socialization, and lifelong learning. We place special emphasis on meeting the needs of youth, older adults, persons with disabilities, and those with limited opportunities for recreation.

A caring and committed community. Healthy communities are composed of residents who actively engage in civic life and are compassionate and generous in their support of others. The department supports numerous boards, commissions, and advisory groups associated with the full range of our programs. We provide an extensive network of volunteer opportunities that facilitate community involvement and personal growth experiences for over 4,500 individuals, while producing more than 108,000 hours of work in support of our programs. In addition, city resources help sustain the regional social service network that addresses the full spectrum of human services needs and issues, such as challenges faced by immigrant populations, affordable housing, mental health support, adult misdemeanor probation services, domestic violence, early childhood development programs, and many others.

Heart and soul. A healthy community has a strong sense of identity and pride, preserves and learns from its past, strongly supports the arts, and embraces diversity. We deliver equitable and accessible community-building programs and collaborate extensively with other departments on community enhancement activities. We co-produce programs and special events celebrating and teaching about the arts, our cultural diversity, and our heritage. We work with partners to produce local celebrations.

Environmental sustainability. Community health is directly affected by our capacity to respond to global climate change and mitigate its impacts. In preparation for future challenges, we manage natural resources to achieve the highest level of ecological function feasible within the constraints of an urban environment. We foster environmental health and resilience by participating in equitable land use planning and creating and advocating for non-motorized transportation systems. We also work to enhance water quality, manage wildlife and forests, provide environmental education, and follow environmental best practices for construction and maintenance activities. We support the city's Environmental Stewardship Initiative, which includes action steps and performance measures for Parks & Community Services and other city departments.

A vibrant economy. Studies have demonstrated that community investment in parks and recreation is returned to a city's residents through tourism revenue, increased property values, and attracting businesses that seek a healthy, beautiful, and culturally vibrant community. The department is active in producing these attributes and therefore plays a key role in supporting economic development strategies.

GOALS AND STRATEGIES

1) Uphold and advance Bellevue's identity as a *City in a Park*

Bellevue is known as a "City in a Park." The department should cultivate and expand on that legacy and seek opportunities to ensure that parks, natural areas, and facilities support the ecological health of a growing city and reflect the ethnic, cultural, and economic demographics of Bellevue and the region.

5-year Strategies:

- a) Align department programs and initiatives with the City Council 20-year vision, "Bellevue 2035—The City Where You Want to Be," and work to meet [Council's three-year priorities](#).
- b) Update the *Parks & Open Space System Plan* and *Recreation Program Plan* to evaluate changes in the community and identify priority park acquisitions, development, facility needs, and programs and services.
- c) Expand the level-of-service analysis in the *Parks & Open Space System Plan* to equitably prioritize areas for acquisition and development based on environmental health and demographic information.
- d) Plan with flexibility and creativity for the expansion, restoration, and development of elements of the park system to strengthen environmental resilience and reflect contemporary recreational interests and community cultural values.
- e) Increase access to programs and services by providing geographically dispersed and culturally responsive opportunities.
- f) Work with the city's Transportation Department and other agencies to support safe pedestrian, bicycle, and transit access to parks, programs, and services.
- g) Collaborate with other city departments to support vibrant, well-maintained, and accessible public spaces.

2) Promote community well-being

A healthy community is one that fosters active minds, healthy lifestyles, interpersonal connections, compassion, and environmental sustainability. Bellevue Parks & Community Services plays an integral role in the promotion of healthy lifestyles by combining parks and recreation with community service functions, including adult misdemeanor probation, wraparound services, and funding for human service programs. The department's unique structure allows it to plan and collaborate across divisions to provide holistically for the well-being of all residents.

5-Year Strategies:

- a) Update the *Human Services Needs Assessment* and develop a *Human Services Plan* to guide the city and community in building and supporting the human services network.
- b) Implement the recommendations of the department's *Diversity Strategic Plan*, the *Recreation Program Plan*, and the *Choices for People with Disabilities* plan to support the accessible and equitable delivery of programs and services.

- c) Increase awareness of financial assistance that is facilitated in the department and regularly analyze scholarship funding levels to improve access.
- d) Promote exploration and unstructured recreational use of parks, trails, and the natural environment through culturally responsive programs and a variety of inclusive facilities.
- e) Advocate for the well-being of people in Bellevue through regional and community planning efforts.
- f) Increase collaboration between the Human Services and Probation divisions to build a more comprehensive understanding of available programs and services and address frontline issues and needs.
- g) Work with providers and clients of adult misdemeanor probation programs to develop services of value to the community and offer opportunities for positive community engagement.
- h) Support the city's emergency response functions, including mass care, housing, human services, and emergency maintenance activities.
- i) Amplify the work of Wraparound Services coordinators by expanding services into select middle schools to increase connection, resources, and stability for families and students.

3) Celebrate Bellevue's cultural diversity, arts community, and rich heritage

As noted in the city's *Diversity Advantage Plan*, diversity is a defining characteristic of Bellevue, enriching our culture, enhancing our arts, strengthening our economy, and broadening the educational experience. The department plays a pivotal role in celebrating Bellevue's cultural richness, protecting many of the city's cultural resources, and providing gathering places, programs, and services that build a sense of community.

5-Year Strategies:

- a) Continue to implement the recommended actions of citywide and department plans to foster equity and inclusion in the communities we serve and build cultural competence within the department.
- b) Design programs, services, parks, facilities, and events that highlight the close connection between culture, arts, and heritage, and that reflect the rich diversity of experiences in Bellevue's communities.
- c) Increase accessible, culturally responsive interpretive features throughout the park system to share information about Bellevue's cultural and natural resources.
- d) Continue to facilitate collaborative relationships with nonprofit organizations that focus on diversity, arts, and heritage.
- e) Continue to explore and implement ways to diversify program participants.

4) Practice environmental stewardship

A healthy environment supports a healthy community. Parks & Community Services is active in a variety of environmental stewardship activities. The department works to protect air and water

quality, preserve wildlife habitat, participate in equitable land use planning, enhance tree canopy and forest health, improve landscape conditions, offer environmental education, and provide environmental guidance for construction and maintenance activities.

5-Year Strategies:

- a) Model environmental stewardship consistently through our design and construction principles, maintenance and operations practices, and our organizational behavior.
- b) Collaborate with other city departments, public agencies, nonprofit organizations, volunteers, and the business community to improve sustainable practices, expand environmental education, ensure compliance with environmental regulations, and demonstrate community stewardship.
- c) Update the *Environmental Best Management Practices & Design Standards* manual.
- d) Investigate and deploy new technologies that support water and energy conservation in department facilities.
- e) Support the update to the city's *Environmental Stewardship Plan* and implement its recommendations.

5) Evaluate the relevance and effectiveness of programs, services, and operations

We live and work in a constantly evolving community, and our programs and services must be relevant to meet public needs, priorities, and address gaps in services. As we meet this ongoing need, our department works with residents to understand what constitutes their vision of a diverse and healthy community.

5-Year Strategies:

- a) Implement the goals and tactics of department plans to support broad and inclusive outreach and improve delivery of relevant, equitable, and effective programs and services.
- b) Conduct regular program reviews and community assessments and add, change, or retire programs and services if needed, as recommended by department plans.
- c) Increase the department's data collection and research capacity and make it centrally accessible to identify gaps in service, share information, and support outreach and decision-making.
- d) Continue to develop and implement asset management processes.
- e) Through the collective impact framework, collect and assess indicator data about community trends to evaluate program effectiveness.

6) Leverage existing assets and partnerships and identify new opportunities to enhance resources

Consistent with our guiding principles, the department embraces existing partnerships and seeks new opportunities to collaborate, share resources, and increase available funding. This

ensures effective use of public funds, enhances programming and service delivery, and invites the community to share in our mission.

5-Year Strategies:

- a) Partner with service providers to share information, address gaps, and leverage community resources for systemic change.
- b) Evaluate existing partnerships to ensure alignment with the department's vision, mission, and goals.
- c) Explore and implement new technology applications to support:
 - information and referral;
 - registration;
 - marketing, communications, and public outreach;
 - recreation, health, and wellness;
 - wayfinding within the park system;
 - mapping;
 - and asset management.
- d) Pursue strategic alliances, partnerships, and external funding opportunities, including grants, foundation support, sponsorships, and donations.
- e) Continue to implement projects funded by the 2008 Bellevue Parks and Natural Areas Levy and identify potential future levy projects.
- f) Develop a long-term financial strategy to support park and open space acquisition and development.
- g) Advocate for the creation of public open space and trails in land use planning efforts and collaborate with other city departments to identify how to achieve trail and open space goals through code and policy development.

7) Sustain and strengthen community support for the work of the department

Bellevue's parks and community services—including recreation, human services, and adult misdemeanor probation—contribute significantly to the city's high quality of life. These are not discretionary services and are critical to sustain community health, environmental resilience, and local economic development. The integration of these services in one department provides a wealth of opportunities for staff to collaborate with each other and with city residents. To maintain a high-quality, accessible, and culturally responsive system, it is important for the department to highlight this work and continue to engage with members of the public to achieve our mission.

5-Year Strategies:

- a) Demonstrate the social and economic value of parks, open spaces, recreation, community services, and a strong human services network.

- b) Participate in and/or co-create community events, as recommended by the department's *Diversity Strategic Plan*.
- c) Implement relevant and culturally responsive marketing and communications strategies to inform and engage the community about our programs and services.
- d) Engage community members in the department's work by offering opportunities to participate in department events, volunteer to assist with programs, and serve on boards, commissions, and advisory groups.

8) Foster employee growth, innovation, and leadership

For the department to function at its highest level, all staff must be well-supported, informed, and empowered. This includes providing necessary trainings and resources, offering opportunities for collaboration across the department and the city, and promoting employee advancement within the organization. An inspired and motivated workforce is sustained by the department's continued recognition of staff achievements and a deeply held dedication to public service.

5-Year Strategies:

- a) Increase collaboration and cross-training opportunities for staff in different divisions and departments.
- b) Support on-job training and ongoing staff development.
- c) Continue to increase communication between staff in all divisions and facilities to ensure that everyone is informed about projects, programs, and services provided by the city.
- d) Share department achievements and progress on department plans more widely so that staff have an understanding of how their work contributes to citywide priorities.

APPENDIX I: PARKS & COMMUNITY SERVICES PLANNING FRAMEWORK

The *Parks & Community Services Strategic Plan* works in concert with other City of Bellevue and Parks & Community Services documents, synthesizing policy-level guidance and translating it into actionable goals and strategies. The plan takes a holistic view of department activities within this context and prioritizes the department's primary areas of focus over the next five years.

Appendix I summarizes the key citywide and departmental plans that most directly influence the department's strategic planning process. This framework includes plans that the city is required to update regularly, as well as plans and reports that the city or department undertakes on a voluntary basis. New plans and initiatives that impact the department can be introduced at any time, and the framework should therefore be considered dynamic.

Citywide Plans and Initiatives:

City of Bellevue Comprehensive Plan

Bellevue's *Comprehensive Plan* is the city's foundational policy document, guiding growth and development here for the next 20 years. The maps, goals, and policies of the plan provide the basis for Bellevue's regulations, programs, and services. The comprehensive plan is organized into two volumes, one focused on citywide policies and the second on goals and policies for Bellevue's 16 neighborhood areas. Volume 1 has background information about Bellevue and the community vision for the future, along with goals for elements such as housing, transportation, human services, and parks. Volume 2 contains goals and policies of the subarea (or neighborhood area) plans and a consolidated list of long-range transportation facility projects. The comprehensive plan is updated every eight years to meet the state's Growth Management Act requirements.

Human Services Needs Update

The department's Human Services division publishes the *Human Services Needs Update* every two years to summarize human services trends, needs, and gaps in Bellevue, East King County, King County, and Washington. The *Needs Update* helps the city's Human Services Commission develop focus areas for funding recommendations to the City Council, guides the Human Services division, and provides information to other city departments, faith communities, concerned community groups, and nonprofit health and human services providers in King County. The update provides a snapshot of resident needs, and also how the City of Bellevue and other groups in the community are coming together to respond using a "collective impact" approach. Collective impact is defined as the commitment of key players from different sectors in the community to a common agenda for effective problem solving.

Diversity Advantage Plan

The Bellevue City Council adopted the *Diversity Advantage Plan* in 2014 to help the city better serve the community and leverage Bellevue's unique diversity as a major asset. The plan recommends 60 actions and is a culmination of proactive efforts to adapt to the rapid changes happening throughout the city and region and to internalize those shifts within the organization. The initiative benefits from wide participation across all departments and among residents. This collaborative approach has moved the project forward, giving the community a sense of shared leadership on diversity and the complex issues associated with it. The plan's focus areas include building cultural competence within the community and within city government, civic engagement, human services, public safety, education, and economic development. To help implement the plan, each city department has developed a *Diversity Strategic Plan* (see description below).

Environmental Stewardship Plan

The Environmental Stewardship Initiative, or ESI, was launched by the City of Bellevue in 2007 to strengthen its commitment to sustainability and environmental stewardship. A strategic plan is regularly updated for the initiative, guiding cross-departmental efforts to minimize the degradation of the community's natural assets and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The current *Environmental Stewardship Plan* includes 57 actions related to greenhouse gas emissions, energy and water, mobility and land use, ecosystems and open space, and materials management and waste for both municipal operations and the entire community. Parks & Community Services is active in environmental stewardship activities and plays a key role in implementing the actions identified in the plan.

Department-level Plans and Initiatives

Parks & Open Space System Plan

The *Parks & Open Space System Plan* is the primary tool used to guide the long-term growth and development of Bellevue's parks and open space system. The core of the plan is a set of 20-year capital project objectives. These long-term objectives are reviewed and updated approximately every six years. The *Parks & Open Space System* identifies seven major focus areas around which the department meets the park, open space, and recreation needs of the community: open space, greenways, wildlife corridors, and trails; park facilities; active recreation facilities; urban park systems; waterfront access; partnership opportunities; and historic, cultural, and art resources. The plan additionally evaluates the geographic distribution of parks, trails, and open space and prioritizes projects that provide parks and facilities in areas that are underserved.

Recreation Program Plan

The *Recreation Program Plan* guides the department's investment in recreation programming. Parks & Community Services is one recreation provider among many in Bellevue, and the plan defines the city's role within this larger system. Updated every five years, the *Recreation Program Plan* establishes a set of core goals for the department and sets city policies for recreation program pricing. The plan emphasizes the city's role in providing recreational opportunities for groups who might otherwise have limited access to programs and services. The plan prioritizes key actions that support equitable, accessible, and culturally responsive program delivery and focuses on strategic use of city resources to fill service gaps.

Choices for People with Disabilities Plan

The *Choices for People with Disabilities* plan is a program-level document that describes how the department implements its recreation policies for residents with disabilities. The *Choices* plan provides an outline of recreational choices available for those in the disability community and describes how the department supports the inclusion process and adaptive recreation, thereby encouraging those living with disabilities to participate in the programs of their choosing. Updated regularly, the plan provides an internal process and strategies that support the successful participation and integration of individuals with disabilities into facilities, programs, activities, and services provided through Parks & Community Services.

Parks & Community Services Diversity Strategic Plan

The *Diversity Strategic Plan* was developed to guide the department in its implementation of the citywide *Diversity Advantage Plan* over a three-year planning horizon. The objectives of the *Diversity Strategic Plan* are to: examine current policies, practices, and procedures as they pertain to diversity- and equity-related issues; to incorporate strategies and best practices from the Diversity Advantage

Initiative as guiding principles for department work plans; and to cultivate a department culture that understands, reflects, and celebrates diversity as its standard while continuing to provide high-quality programs and services for all communities in Bellevue.

Marketing & Communications Plan

The *Marketing & Communications Plan* ensures that the department's marketing efforts are relevant and effective, helps sustain community support for the work of the department, increases awareness of opportunities provided by the department, and identifies a common approach to department-wide marketing strategies and tactics. Updated every five years, the plan outlines recommendations that: position the department as a key economic driver and catalyst for improved quality of life, ensure communications and marketing efforts are inclusive and culturally responsive, leverage technology to improve communication with customers, assess the relevance and effectiveness of programs and services, modify marketing delivery methods, and develop methods to enhance the department's general marketing and communications program.

Environmental Best Management Practices & Design Standards Manual

The *Environmental Best Management Practices & Design Standards* manual describes the department's current practices and standards in developing and maintaining park, open space, and trail facilities. Updated every four years, the manual was written to provide clear direction on standard operational procedures and design features, to effectively communicate the operational practices of the department to the public, and to respond to regional, state, and federal environmental issues. Topics addressed include: construction site management, integrated pest management, irrigation and water management, nursery operations, plant beds, turf, trees and natural areas, trails, and agricultural areas.

Structural Operations Plans

The department's Resource Management division regularly updates several plans to guide maintenance and refurbishment for all park facilities. These plans include the *Structural Operations & Maintenance Management Plan*, which directs the maintenance of department property and equipment; the *Renovation Plan*, which covers non-routine major maintenance or refurbishment of parks, trails, and facilities; the *Public Playground Safety Program* plan, which provides guidance on best practices for playground safety inspections, maintenance, and incident report; and the *Facility Security Program* plan, which outlines security responsibilities and procedures.