



Date: September 10, 2020

To: Mayor Robinson and City Councilmembers

From: Bellevue Parks & Community Services Board

Subject: Proposed 2021-2027 Parks Capital Investment Program

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Parks & Community Services 2021-2027 Capital Investment Program (CIP) Plan. We hope that these comments are helpful as the Council prioritizes the City's capital investment needs for the next seven years. We recognize the challenge you face balancing the expected financial impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the City's operating and capital budgets, while preparing the City for growth in the years ahead.

The Board reviewed potential parks capital investments in relation to the City Council Vision Priorities (2018-2020) and noted that park investments directly advance many of the strategic target areas, including High Quality Built and Natural Environment; Bellevue: Great Places Where You Want to Be; Achieving Human Potential; Economic Development; and High Performance Government. We believe that the list of recommended park capital projects below provide significant return on investment by advancing multiple Council Vision Priorities in several different Strategic Target Areas.

Of particular note, we continue to support the upcoming effort to update the *Parks and Open Space System Plan*, including an analysis of the level of service for a growing population and creation of a financial strategy for these services (**Council Priority #12**). We encourage the Council to reaffirm the need for a balanced and sustainable approach for advancing the City's long-term goals and maintaining the vision of a "City in a Park." The Parks & Community Services Board looks forward to working with and directly supporting City Council on this important issue over the next several years.

The Parks & Community Services Board reviewed the budget process and provided feedback on Parks CIP proposals at our meetings in March and July. Overall, the Board considered a variety of factors in developing these recommendations, including projects that are geographically distributed, spur economic development, provide multiple benefits, have innovative funding, deliver levy commitments, and maintain existing infrastructure. Board priorities include:

- Continuing the commitment to the voters from the 2008 levy, utilizing additional levy funds to develop Airfield Park as the next major Parks levy project;
 - Completing construction of the Downtown Park Gateway (**Council Priority #8**) and continuing to add funds for Meydenbauer Bay Park Planning and Design. Both of these projects build on recent momentum and are signature elements of the Grand Connection vision (**Council Priority #15**);
-
-

- Maintaining existing capital infrastructure, including both the Parks Renovation and Enterprise Facility improvement programs. While it is important and cost-effective to maintain our current investments, Parks showcase the City and serve as critical spaces to meet the needs of residents as we emerge from the current pandemic;
- Continuing to invest in ongoing Property Acquisition, with a specific focus on areas of Bellevue currently underserved by parks, such as along the stream corridors in BelRed and adding needed neighborhood parks in areas such as Eastgate, among others;
- Continuing to invest in the ongoing planning of Bellevue's park and open space system, including funding to support additional open space and park improvements Downtown to serve a growing neighborhood and additional work related to the Aquatics Center Feasibility Study (**Council Priority #13**);
- Planning and designing future parks and trails that implement the BelRed Parks & Streams projects in the BelRed Subarea plan, using revenues collected from the amenity incentive system in the Bel-Red subarea (**Council Priority #5**); and
- Completing previously approved neighborhood park improvements in Newport Hills and Bridle Trails.

We understand that the above list can be accomplished within the additional Parks Levy and Real Estate Excise Tax revenue forecasted to be available in the updated plan. However, we also know that additional Parks capital funding will be needed in future years to create parks in the BelRed area, provide additional green space in the Downtown core, complete the Meydenbauer Bay Master Plan, and to create additional opportunities for the aquatics community. While the recent update of the aquatics feasibility study was an important step, the scale and scope of this facility will need creative funding solutions, including public-private partnerships, alternative funding sources, and operating subsidies to ensure public access. It's important that we continue to plan for the public funding to ensure we are able to meet the public obligation and see the project through to completion.

Bellevue takes great pride in its parks and natural areas. We have seen that these investments contribute greatly to the quality of life in Bellevue, creating a special place in which families and business seek to locate and flourish. Research consistently shows that urban parks and recreation systems have positive economic impacts beyond a place to recreate and socialize with friends and family. Additionally, research shows that high quality, well-maintained parks contribute positively to the overall economic development of the City, including raising property values, attracting and retaining key businesses, promoting tourism, and protecting water and air quality.

The COVID-19 pandemic has put increased pressure on our parks system as people have been recreating locally more so than usual. For some, it has been a pleasant discovery of parks and trails nearby that offer fresh air and exercise. For others, it has highlighted areas of need where parks and recreation facilities are few in number and where popular community parks have hit their carrying capacity more often than usual. Continuing to invest in expanding our parks and open space system is critical to meeting the immediate needs of our residents and families for high-quality, local amenities during the COVID-19 outbreak, and to position the City for healthy economic growth in the years ahead.

Once again, we appreciate the ability to provide comments on the 2021-2027 Parks CIP Plan, and look forward to continuing to engage as the budget process moves forward. Feel free to contact any of the Parks & Community Services Board members if you have questions or comments about the content of this message.