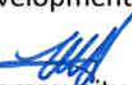




Date: October 10, 2017

To: Jennifer Robertson, Councilmember
Bellevue City Council
Parks & Community Services Board Council Liaison

Bradley Calvert, Planning Manager
Planning & Community Development Department

From: Mark Van Hollebeke, Chair 
On behalf of the Parks & Community Services Board

Subject: Comments on the Draft Grand Connection Framework Plan

In January and July of this year, the Parks & Community Services Board received progress reports on the Grand Connection and Wilburton planning initiatives. As the Board discussed the draft Grand Connection Framework Plan, themes emerged that we ask the City to consider as it finalizes the Framework Plan and moves ahead with planning around the Interstate 405 crossing alternatives and the Wilburton Commercial Area redevelopment plan.

Paramount is Bellevue's long-standing claim to be a City in a Park. This vision was affirmed by the City Council in the 2015 Comprehensive Plan, which describes how that claim is to be maintained:

Bellevue has a system of parks, open spaces, cultural facilities and recreational amenities throughout the city. These provide abundant access to natural beauty and extraordinary experiences to define a lifetime of recreation and learning.

From this statement, several themes can be drawn and applied to the Grand Connection Framework Plan. These include enhancing Bellevue's system of parks and open spaces, designing for natural beauty, providing abundant access, and supporting recreation and cultural facilities.

A system of parks and open spaces

Chapters 3 and 4 of the draft Framework Plan describe the Grand Connection route and the distinct identity of the route. The Board wholly supports expanding the concept of the Grand Connection to reach out beyond the confines of the primary route to embrace other nearby amenities north and south including Bellevue's original grand connector, the Lake to Lake Greenway Trail as it extends along Main Street to the Bellevue Botanical Garden, the Eastside Rail Corridor and beyond to Lake Sammamish. Tendrils from the Grand Connection should reach north to encompass McCormick Park, Ashwood Park and the Regional Library, with wayfinding that enhances park visitors' awareness of other nearby parks. In this way, the Grand Connection can be a valuable toehold for the City's existing and future efforts to improve overall connectivity in Downtown Bellevue for pedestrians and bicyclists.

Designing for natural beauty

As it serves to connect existing and future parks and public spaces like pearls on a string, the Grand Connection should also maintain its own cohesive and unique sense of place and identity. As such,

the Board supports and Framework Plan's recommendation that the Natural Landscape be the primary identity and character for the Grand Connection. The Board discussed the benefits of greening the corridor through use of vegetation and water elements along the route. This is consistent with the City's 2016 Parks & Open Space System Plan, which (as it has since the 1980's) emphasizes greenways throughout the city that "provide a natural contrast to urban density."

Providing abundant access

The Board finds that the Framework Plan could do more to analyze and plan for access and inclusion, using the broadest definitions of those two terms. How can the Grand Connection improve access through Downtown for an aging population and people with mobility challenges? How can the Grand Connection create public spaces attractive and useful to young families and children living an urban lifestyle? How can wayfinding along the route and throughout downtown be improved to best serve Bellevue's increasingly diverse and foreign-born residents?

Supporting recreation and cultural facilities

The ultimate desired outcome of the Grand Connection is to create a signature urban experience for Bellevue residents, workers and visitors. People will be drawn to the Grand Connection by its design, but equally, if not more so, by what is programmed for the corridor. The Board applauds including a chapter in the framework plan listing ideas and opportunities for programming. Yet, a framework for implementing programming is not sufficiently addressed in the Implementation and Next Steps chapter. A seed of programming around the Arts Program is included. This is valuable, but too narrowly focused. Ideas for implementing programming should be more fully explored in the final Framework Plan, including:

- Interpretation of the city's history and heritage
- Active recreation
- Community services
- Community gathering opportunities and events
- Celebration of cultural diversity and inclusion

As the City continues in this process of design and planning for the Grand Connection and Wilburton, the Parks & Community Services Board will remain engaged and interested in taking full advantage of opportunities to provide feedback and input. As an example, the Board has already discussed the value of creating a public park of significance on the east side of the Grand Connection to counterbalance Downtown Park and Meydenbauer Bay Park, which anchor the west side of the Connection.

In conclusion, the Parks & Community Services Board wholeheartedly supports the vision of the Grand Connection and, if fully realized, we believe it moves us one step closer to becoming the City in a Park that the Council envisions. In particular, the Board supports the shift away from Downtown Bellevue's existing pattern of discrete public and private public spaces as "hidden gems" toward a more connected, inclusive and welcoming system of parks and public spaces.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments and we look forward to future such opportunities.
