



Bellevue Planning Commission

June 9, 2021

PLANNING COMMISSION STUDY SESSION ITEM

SUBJECT

Final Review on the Neighborhood Area Plans for Northeast Bellevue and Northwest Bellevue: Study Session #2.

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POLICY ISSUES

Neighborhood Area Plans bring the City's broader vision to life in a local way. The policies found within these plans provide guidance to City staff and consultants, those working on projects in the community, and others helping to shape our neighborhoods' futures. These broad plans provide a framework for future work in the neighborhoods.

DIRECTION NEEDED FROM THE PLANNING COMMISSION

ACTION



DIRECTION



INFORMATION ONLY



These plans are part of the annual Comprehensive Plan Amendment (CPA) process. Tonight's focus is on the draft policies themselves. Staff is seeking direction on these plans and how they reflect the needs and desires of Northeast Bellevue and Northwest Bellevue. Direction is requested to schedule a public hearing for July 14th to move these plans forward in the CPA process.

BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS

The Community Development Department is leading this effort, and the first two new Neighborhood Area Plans under development are for Northwest Bellevue and Northeast Bellevue. The goal is to update all Neighborhood Area Plans over the coming years, focusing on two at a time to provide focused outreach and community engagement opportunities.

Plan Narrative

The draft plans, attached as part of [the May 26 Planning Commission study session materials](#), have been included in this packet as Attachments A and B. These drafts do not include any alterations for clarity of discussion, though a few minor changes are recommended in the Policy Overview sections below. These drafts include three sections prior to the policies themselves. The content of these sections was covered in that previous study session and highlights the vision for each community, some data related to each

neighborhood, and the associated challenges and opportunities to provide a context for the policies that reside in the final section.

Feedback from the community drove the topics covered in these sections and ultimately in the policies themselves, resulting in five distinct policy subsections. Each subsection includes a brief narrative to hone in on that topic and the neighborhood's associated priorities.

The first of these sections, "Sense of Place," includes policies and narrative related to the parts of a neighborhood that define its individual experiences. This includes policies related to neighborhood character and experiential impacts in particular. The remaining sections focus on a particular topic of interest, including "Sense of Community" and its associated policies on bringing community members together, "Housing Affordability" describing policies for providing a range of housing choices, "Mobility and Access" and its policies related to transportation, and "Environment" addressing the natural environment, trees in particular, parks, and open space. Each of these subsections focuses on a particular area of interest for the community, while the preceding sections highlight priorities and interactions between these topics.

Land Use Plan Maps

Each Neighborhood Area Plan includes a land use plan map designating land uses across the neighborhood. The scope for updating these plans does not include altering these land use designations. Northwest Bellevue, which includes the same boundaries as the previous North Bellevue Subarea, therefore does not include any changes to this plan within the scope of this project.

Northeast Bellevue, which includes altered boundaries as described in the previous packet materials, requires updates to its land use plan map and those of the adjacent affected areas. Attachment A therefore includes draft updated land use plan maps for Northeast Bellevue, Crossroads, and Southeast Bellevue (what will become West Lake Sammamish and Lake Hills when that plan is altered as part of Neighborhood Area Planning). These draft plans do not include any alterations to the land use designations themselves but instead include simply updated boundaries for the neighborhoods and, where relevant, Districts themselves.

Neighborhood Area Plans' Role

The Comprehensive Plan is a long-range planning document, focusing on broad policies meant to guide planning efforts for decades to come. On May 26, Planning Commissioners expressed concern that more time may be required to explore a higher level of specificity. The areas where interest in more specificity was expressed fall into two categories: (1) topics that require a Citywide approach; and (2) specific implementation strategies. The former will be discussed below under "Citywide Approaches," while Attachment B describes the latter.

The Comprehensive Plan, including the Subarea/Neighborhood Area Plans included in Volume 2, does not include detailed action items or implementation strategies. While these are therefore out of the scope of this project, staff have included for reference a number of action ideas from the community in the Neighborhood Proposals list outlined in Attachment B. This list will not be adopted as part of the Comprehensive Plan and is not included for Planning Commission direction or action but rather is an important record of proposed ideas coming from the community. These ideas may be referenced by City staff and the communities themselves as some of the possible ways to begin implementing the policies found within the Neighborhood Area Plans.

Citywide Approaches

Neighborhood Area Plans focus on specific areas, with policies used to define what is unique about that neighborhood in particular. Certain topics that impact neighborhoods on a Citywide scale are therefore best achieved as part of Citywide approaches to planning rather than using an approach where each Neighborhood Area Plan addresses a topic individually. The topics that have come up repeatedly during the Great Neighborhoods process that would benefit from Citywide discussion and implementation fall primarily into the following three areas:

1. *Updates to code related to tree preservation and/or removal* – This is already called out for in the recently adopted Environmental Stewardship Plan. Rather than implementing individual code changes that impact separate neighborhoods, a larger effort is planned as an upcoming workplan element.
2. *Increasing housing options within the neighborhoods* – Both neighborhoods had many discussions about housing affordability and the possible ways to address this within their neighborhood. Policies have been drafted to address those areas that are specific to each neighborhood, such as the importance of providing a buffer from Downtown within Northwest Bellevue. Interest in increasing housing options such as detached accessory dwelling units (DADUs), duplexes, and townhomes, would benefit from a Citywide approach that incorporates the larger discussions of affordability, growth targets, and education for the community on how these topics intersect with one another. These two neighborhoods expressed clear priorities for addressing the issue of affordability. This priority is reflected in a number of policies in each draft plan, but the implementation methods will require a Citywide discussion to determine any potential code changes and how they would impact all neighborhoods. With the Comprehensive Plan periodic update and its associated housing growth targets discussions coming up shortly, the implementation of the proposed policies regarding housing options will be essential.
3. *Policies limiting multifamily and/or retail land uses within the larger Crossroads area* – There is a history associated with the existing Crossroads policies that are being shifted over to Northeast Bellevue. Rather than approaching a discussion about only the small portion of the affected area that is being shifted over to Northeast Bellevue, staff recommend discussing these policies as a whole with future work programs such as the update of the Crossroads Subarea plan, larger growth targets and housing affordability Citywide discussions for context. These particular policies should therefore be incorporated when the related Crossroads policies are discussed as part of a more informed discussion.

Housing Options

Item number 2 above, related to housing options, is an area of particular interest for many neighborhoods. Bellevue is struggling with housing affordability, particularly within the neighborhoods as property values continue to rise. While the proposed policies call for increased housing options in a number of ways, connecting the causes and effects of these concerns and the potential implementation options would benefit from discussion at a Citywide scale. In particular, the upcoming discussions on growth targets and planning under the Growth Management Act, including the number of housing units that must be accommodated in the coming years within Bellevue, must be a part of determining appropriate solutions for the neighborhoods.

There was interest on May 26 in staff using their expertise to move this conversation forward. Staff recommends incorporating implementation discussions on housing choices in the neighborhoods into upcoming Citywide efforts. The larger issues can then be considered in tandem with the concerns and

interests expressed by residents themselves throughout the Great Neighborhoods process. In particular, staff found that both Northeast Bellevue and Northwest Bellevue residents felt that introducing new housing typologies to only their neighborhoods and not others was inequitable and did not consider the larger needs of the City as a whole. Implementing any introduction of these new typologies to the neighborhoods should account for the impact on all neighborhoods rather than only these first two to be updated through Great Neighborhoods.

Staff also recommends that a larger education effort about the Citywide needs, challenges, and opportunities be a central part of the future implementation efforts to address housing affordability concerns. It was clear that the more specific, in-depth discussions that took place at the housing options Great Neighborhoods event led to a greater understanding of the complexities of this issue, particularly when connections to larger Citywide growth discussions were considered. Deeper discussion was then possible, but this discussion is required on a larger scale to properly address these issues and their relationship to growth pressures across the City.

Tackling these issues through an appropriate level of informed discussion will require a longer and more in-depth Citywide process than can be accomplished as part of the scope of updating these two Neighborhood Area Plans. The details of implementing the draft policies will require code discussions, which requires Citywide input. In particular, hearing more diverse voices at this stage will be essential. This is best achieved when engagement is targeted across the City, better utilizing existing cultural networks that often draw from Bellevue and even the Eastside as a whole.

Upcoming Schedule and Adoption Process

On May 26, Planning Commission expressed an interest in reviewing and potentially expanding the schedule for adopting these two Neighborhood plans. Given that staff has led a robust year-long engagement process outlined in the May 26 Commission packet materials, staff's recommendation is that additional engagement would not achieve additional consensus from the community on controversial issues such as housing affordability and diversity. As described above, the areas where the Commission expressed interest in additional detail fall outside the scope of these Neighborhood Area Plans and are either implementation efforts addressed in Attachment B or need to be approached as Citywide discussions.

Staff believe that additional community outreach will not result in significantly different feedback or engagement than what has already been garnered from the community. Two mailings were utilized as part of this effort, one early on in the process tied to a broad values survey to guide later conversations and important topics for the community and a later one focused on issues that were brought up in those subsequent meetings. These mailings were timed intentionally to best garner broad input early on and specific input later on in order to inform policy drafting and editing. The additional 17 broad meetings and dozens of more individualized conversations that have taken place have given staff a very clear view of the varied opinions and priorities that exist within both Northeast Bellevue and Northwest Bellevue.

Tonight's study session is the second of two scheduled study sessions for reviewing the draft plans themselves after an introductory study session that was held on April 28. A public hearing is required and could be scheduled for July 14. This timing would allow for an additional study session, if desired by the Commission, in late July to be utilized for further discussion of the draft plans and public comments resulting from the public hearing. This would allow for further discussion to occur prior to the August

break in Commission meetings. In order to move these two plans forward as part of the annual CPA process, City Council would need to review them in the Fall and adopt them before the end of the year.

Northeast Bellevue Policy Overview

The last major update of the Northeast Subarea Plan was in 1985. Since then much has changed in Bellevue and in the region, yet many of the same issues remain important to residents today. The following sections summarize key policy areas.

Sense of Place

Residents still want to maintain the peaceful woodsy feel of Northeast Bellevue as well as the quality of housing throughout their neighborhood. Maintaining buffers between their neighborhood and surrounding areas experiencing rapid growth is deemed essential, whether that be a stand of trees along BelRed Road or the open space area part of the Bellevue Technology Center. Coordination with neighboring jurisdictions is also deemed important to ensure graceful transitions between different intensities of development.

The new Northeast Bellevue Neighborhood Area is a combination of both Northeast Bellevue and a portion of the Crossroads Subarea, therefore a few key policies from the Crossroads' plan were transferred over to the new Northeast Bellevue plan. These include policies [S-NE-6](#) and [S-NE-7](#), which do not allow multifamily in District A or retail uses north of NE 24th. As discussed above, both of these policies apply to larger areas and require a more comprehensive discussion before considering changes, so they have been retained in the new plan. In addition to those policies, recent community feedback on this shift has led staff to recommend including a policy stemming from previous [S-CR-66](#), which designates the Bellevue Technology Center property as office use. This recommended policy would read "Office use is appropriate for the property east of 156th Avenue NE between Northup Way and NE 24th Street."

Sense of Community

There is also interest today in meeting one's neighbors, whether that be during a walk, meeting up at a playground or school or through a neighborhood sponsored tree workshop or other community event. Desires to enhance and/or restore existing gathering places were expressed such as restoring the former Ivanhoe youth theatre to encourage community building. Other policies to strengthen community include programming and education to support better neighborhood organization, block parties and community led workshops. Strengthening community ties was viewed as especially important given the greater diversity of cultures that comprise Northeast Bellevue today.

Housing Affordability

Since the last iteration of the Northeast Bellevue plan, affordability of housing across the neighborhood has become a top priority. Interest in increasing the variety of housing options within the neighborhood was expressed by many residents and is seen as a key strategy to enabling more older adults to age in place. Simultaneously, many feel strongly about maintaining the character of the primarily single-family neighborhood. Interests in introducing DADUs or duplexes are balanced by concerns about potential neighbor to neighbor conflict resulting from their introduction. Policy [S-NE-18](#) encourages exploration of these housing choices, which would be implemented on a Citywide basis as discussed above. Policies [S-NE 19 through 21](#) address some of the concerns many residents have about potential impacts of these typologies.

Mobility and Access

The desire to reduce traffic congestion continues, though major pain points appear to have shifted. Getting into and out of sub-neighborhoods has become more of a challenge with increased traffic volumes along major arterials due to increased growth in Overlake, BelRed and Crossroads. The first set of policies focus on safety across all modes of travel. Increased interest in alternatives to driving is reflected in the second set of policies, which focuses on “expanding transportation choices.” Interest in first/last mile public transportation is reflected in [S-NE-31](#) due to the low density of the neighborhood. The final set of policies focuses on access to goods and services, which are often found in adjacent areas of the City rather than within Northeast Bellevue itself.

Environment

Interest in the preservation of trees and open space has only grown stronger over the decades. This stems from trees being one of Northeast Bellevue’s most valuable assets and their playing a key role in defining Northeast Bellevue’s neighborhood character. The first set of policies in this section addresses the preservation and enhancement of tree canopy, as well as support for the planned Citywide look at existing codes related to tree preservation. As described above, this is a planned effort of great interest to Northeast Bellevue and is referenced in [S-NE-39](#). In response to continued feedback on this area, staff recommends adding a new policy to this section that addresses the importance of tree preservation in general in addition to the existing policies. This policy could match the language staff proposes below for alterations to [S-NW-43](#). Many residents are interested in helping to make sure all Northeast residents are aware of the significant value of trees and understand proper tree care, so educational approaches are supported by Policy [S-NE-41](#).

The second set of policies addresses the protection of water bodies, while the final set focuses on general protection and enhancement of parks and open space. Public Parks are a valued resource in Northeast Bellevue. While Northeast Bellevue has several parks, there is also a strong desire to acquire more park land that would serve to connect existing park and open space and other natural assets and preserve existing open space areas buffering Northeast Bellevue from adjacent rapidly developing areas. This interest is reflected in [S-NE-46](#), which outlines specific scenarios where park acquisition should be prioritized.

Northwest Bellevue Policy Overview

The current Northwest Bellevue (as North Bellevue) Subarea plan was last given major updates in 1983. The priorities described in that plan vary from the priorities of the community today in a few primary ways. A shift from language protecting single-family neighborhoods to goals emphasizing the importance of maintaining the variety of neighborhoods, including single-family areas, has occurred. Single-family homes only constitute about half of the homes in Northwest Bellevue, so the new plan reflects the importance of all these areas. A number of policies existed in the last plan that are covered in other elements of the Comprehensive Plan, such as environmental best practices.

Many of the remaining goals have remained in the decades since 1983. Both plans emphasize the need for a variety of housing types, though the new plan defines this in more detail and ties this need to affordability concerns more directly. The older plan describes the importance of investing economically in the neighborhood but does not include any policies on the issue, whereas the new plan includes policies around redevelopment and maintenance. Policies related to transportation concerns have remained largely the same in general, though today’s community emphasized the importance of

diversifying modes of transportation and increasing pedestrian access. Finally, the importance of parks and green spaces has remained constant. An emphasis on tree canopy retention has become heightened in the new plan as well.

Sense of Place

This section focuses on what is unique about Northwest Bellevue's location, as well as how to respond to these conditions. The many variety of densities and land uses found within the neighborhood are an asset to the community, so policies are included to maintain and enhance this variety while ensuring that new development is integrated into these "sub-neighborhoods." Policies enhancing the experiential quality partner with this goal, such as [S-NW-7](#), which encourages "small-scale commercial uses ... to improve access to goods and services." Finally, Northwest Bellevue hugs Downtown Bellevue and is adjacent to Kirkland, Clyde Hill, and Medina. Policies in this section encourage active planning to integrate with these neighboring jurisdictions while clearly defining a difference between Downtown Bellevue and Northwest Bellevue. [S-NW-9](#) encourages "buffers such as McCormick Park and/or gradients of building scale" to "ease the transition" to Downtown Bellevue.

Sense of Community

Today's Northwest Bellevue community had an increased interest in finding gathering opportunities, programs and places for getting together as a community. Inclusivity and diversity was discussed at length, so policies encouraging ways to "welcome new residents" ([S-NW-17](#)) and encourage the inclusion of children, the disabled, seniors, and those of all cultures in neighborhood activities. Allowing seniors in the neighborhood to remain and age in place important, as addressed in Policies [S-NW-21 through 23](#).

Housing Affordability

This relatively short section includes topics discussed at length. As discussed above, the community hopes to address the affordability of housing and allow for a diversity of housing options. This is reflected in the goal and policies of this section, including [S-NW-24](#), which encourages "a mix of housing typologies, within both lower and higher intensity districts." [S-NW-25](#) and [S-NW-26](#) follow this up by calling for exploration of how to incorporate the new housing typology most discussed for single-family areas, detached accessory dwelling units. As discussed above, this exploration needs to occur on a Citywide scale but is called out in this plan due to its importance to this community.

Mobility and Access

This section focuses on transportation issues. Pedestrian safety was central to these discussions and is reflected in the first set of policies. Additional modes of access, such as bicycling and taking transit, were also key and are reflected in the second goal and associated policies. Vehicles are still central to many Northwest Bellevue residents, so maintaining efficient vehicular movement is supported by the third set of policies. Finally, access to particular areas such as "between residential areas and popular destinations, particularly schools and parks" is emphasized ([S-NW-39](#)).

Environment

The importance of trees comes out strongest in this section as the focus of the first goal and associated policies. While planting of trees is an important long-term step, protecting the existing tree canopy is essential. A Citywide effort is planned to explore alterations to existing City code related to tree retention, which is of great interest to this community and is discussed in [S-NW-42](#). Additional feedback from the community since these drafts were released calls for stronger language about tree protection.

While specific implementation of code changes is beyond the scope of these plans, staff recommends strengthening the language of [S-NW-43](#) to read “Support efforts to both protect Northwest Bellevue’s tree canopy and enhance the health of trees on both public and private property.”

ATTACHMENTS

- A. Northeast Bellevue Draft Plan
- B. Northwest Bellevue Draft Plan
- C. Draft Land Use Plan Maps to implement new Northeast Bellevue planning boundary
- D. Neighborhood Proposals