



REPORT:

HEART OF BELLEVUE

2021 DOWNTOWN RECOVERY PROGRAM

Presented to: Bellevue City Council

Submitted by:
Bellevue Downtown Association



Core Team: Patrick Bannon | Mike Ogliore | Apryl Battin | Kensey Wentworth
apryl@bellevuedowntown.com | (206) 383-4864

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Introduction

In the wake of COVID-19, the Bellevue Downtown Association (BDA) launched a Downtown-wide business engagement and place-marketing program, connecting customers and community in the Heart of Bellevue. The 2021 Program built on the successful foundation and approach behind the 2020 “Heart of Bellevue” recovery campaign, and the 2019 “Grand Connection” activation pilot, in partnership with the City of Bellevue and other key Downtown stakeholders.

Objective

STRENGTHEN OUR CORE.

The 2021 Program elements focused on promoting and activating our businesses and the Downtown environment, as more customers and a broader representation of our workforce returned. Working through changing conditions, we stayed nimble in our tactics, relying on frequent problem-solving and collaboration with the City of Bellevue and other key partners. We continued strengthening our stakeholder relationships, marketing efforts and activation of the built environment – leading to Downtown and community-wide public benefits.

Goals & Outcomes

The Heart of Bellevue campaign delivered citywide benefits such as: increased downtown visits, consumer spending and associated tax revenue; activations in the public realm encouraging visitation, leisure, recreation and general enjoyment; and increased private sector participation, support and contributions to public realm activations and placemaking efforts.

Importantly, the Heart of Bellevue campaign continued to support and align with the City of Bellevue’s adopted Economic Development Plan, including five of the plan’s foundational strategies and specific direct strategies for Capacity Building and Partnerships, Small Business & Entrepreneurship, Retail, and Creative Economy.

Our overarching intent and end result for the community:

- Increase overall activity and engagement Downtown.
- Connect customers and residents with Downtown businesses to build awareness and grow customer loyalty.
- Sustain progress forming a longer-term, sustainable model for the activation and operations of Downtown, beginning with the Bellevue Transit Center and placemaking opportunities along the Grand Connection.
- Further develop the capacity of businesses, property owners and residents to partner with the City to support placemaking needs.
- Promote and support the Healthy Washington - Roadmap to Recovery plan and vaccine rollout.

The program focused on citywide benefits such as:

- Increase downtown visits, consumer spending and associated tax revenue.
- Activate the public realm, encouraging visitation, leisure, recreation and general enjoyment.



- Build and reinforce robust stakeholder relationships that can better connect and inform businesses of available resources.
- Increase private sector participation, support and contributions to public realm activations and placemaking efforts.
- Customers will venture out and rediscover Downtown through a lens of community-building, supporting local business and enjoying the smaller scale activations.

The Campaign

Heart of Bellevue: A DOWNTOWN RECOVERY CAMPAIGN

Launched June 25, 2020 - Present

Opportunity:

The spirit of this campaign is about connections. We focused on the power of collaborative partnerships and the **love for the place and the people behind it**. This multi-faceted marketing and economic activation program would engage residents, workers, visitors, businesses and property owners to support the return of foot traffic and revitalization of economic activity needed for businesses to succeed upon reopening. The Heart of Bellevue Program had an active campaign element of bringing life back to the downtown core through patronage of restaurants, retail and cultural institutions.

EFFORTS INCLUDED:

1. STORYTELLING

Interviews and profiles with Bellevue businesses and artists highlighting stories of activity, creativity and recovery in the community. Development of a multi-faceted print, online and social media marketing campaign that engaged residents, workers, visitors, businesses and property owners to support the return of foot traffic and revitalization of economic activity needed for businesses to succeed upon reopening.

2. LIVE EVENTS

Adaptation of arts and cultural programming for online/virtual audiences.

3. PLACEMAKING

Execution of multiple placemaking activations with key properties and businesses, including lanterns and banners along the Grand Connection in the downtown core, the “Al Fresco” outdoor dining in Old Bellevue, and holiday lights installed in the Downtown Park, Grand Connection and Main Street.

4. CITY COLLABORATION & KEY PARTNERSHIPS

Work with the City of Bellevue staff regularly to cross-promote messaging, generate stories, and streamline the permitting process for small businesses. Partner with key organizations, retailers and institutions, such as Visit Bellevue, The Bellevue Collection, The Bravern, Bellevue Library, KidsQuest Children’s Museum, Old Bellevue Merchants Association and the Bellevue Arts Museum to cast a wide net and stretch the message to support your city’s core.



RESULTS

This multi-faceted campaign included print, online and social media marketing. Branding was bright and used noticeable, vibrant colors (orange, gold, turquoise). Deliverables included magazine ads, 11"x17" posters, 4"x5" handouts, pole banners, construction fence panels, weekly e-newsletters, blog series and BDA social channels.

PRINT

425 Magazine Ad

4 - Full page advertisement in the June, September and December issue of 425 Magazine.

Distributed/displayed by: paid subscribers, hotel rooms newsstands, community space, offices and events.

Readership per month: 199,897

4"x5" Postcard

152 - 4"x5" Postcards distributed to Downtown Bellevue business owners that explained the campaign.

11"x17" Poster

200 - 11"x17" Posters distributed to small business owners and residential buildings to display in their storefront windows and/or community bulletin boards.

OUTDOOR

Pole Banners

12 - 2' x 4' light pole banners with event logo were displayed along the Grand Connection between BAM and the Transit Center [18,508 pedestrians/day, pre-Covid]

Construction Fence Panel

1 - Panel alternating along Vulcan's 555 Tower construction signage along 108th and 6th

DIGITAL

Stats are from **June 24, 2020 – October 14, 2021** to showcase the entire campaign's performance.

E-Newsletters

68 - Weekly dedicated newsletters emailed every Monday, sent to 10,380 subscribers, with an average 32.3% total opens rate.

Blogs

324+ Spotlight blogs featuring an interview with a small business owner., accompanied by photographs
113,196 Total Blog Pageviews

Website (BellevueDowntown.com)

966,032 - Total Pageviews

413,968 - Users (419,146 New Users)

Social

1,260+ - Businesses featured via social posts (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn)

247,983 People reached by BDA Facebook posts

19,450 People reached by BDA Instagram posts



EFFORT #1 - STORYTELLING

One of the major components of this campaign was storytelling. Since June 2020, the BDA **published 324 blog spotlights**, highlighting the stories of activity, creativity and recovery from business owners and artists in the community. Stories were collected via an online form, through referrals, and discovered through direct BDA outreach.

Stories featured the places people would shop, dine and get personal services at in Bellevue. Businesses were given a platform to share their story to the Bellevue community. This included the history of their business, any specials or promotions happening, and new safety procedures they put in place during the pandemic.

When a story was written, it was cross-promoted across all BDA channels. This included the BDA blog, e-newsletter and social pages. This maximized the reach for each published story.

In December 2020, we launched a new blog series called **"Person Behind the Place,"** which featured the individuals who make up an authentic and dynamic Downtown. As of October 13, we have featured 45 individuals in the series. The Q&A features a range of people including business owners, employees, CEOs, downtown residents, chefs, and others.

In September 2021, the **"Hello, again!"** series launched as some workplaces welcomed back vaccinated employees. The series included Downtown activity and information guides and 'welcome back' pole banners displayed throughout Downtown Bellevue. This series will be re-launched in early 2022 when more workers return to the office.

EFFORT #2 – LIVE EVENTS

Due to restrictions on in-person gatherings, the BDA had to adapt community event programming for public safety. As a result, we produced a hybrid (virtual and in-person) music series - **Bellevue Beats** - that launched on April 7, 2021. As COVID-19 restrictions eased in the summer, we were able to produce two large outdoor community events: **Bellevue 4th of July Fireworks** and the **Bellevue Downtown Arts Market**. In October, we produced an indoor **Jazz & Blues Music Series** with proof of vaccine requirements in place. We look forward to producing the **Bellevue Downtown Ice Rink** for its 24th year, opening on November 19.

Whether virtual or in person, event objectives remained the same as non-pandemic years: open to all ages, include a variety of music genres, and - if possible - free to all. In addition to giving artists a place to share their work, we promoted musician's Venmo or PayPal accounts as "virtual tip jars" and linked to local artists' online portfolios. The additional promotion was well-received by both artists and the public.

BELLEVUE BEATS MUSIC SERIES (APR. 7 – SEPT. 8, 2021)

Backed by our partners, members and in partnership with the City of Bellevue, the BDA launched the Bellevue Beats Music Series, a six-month series of live and local music. Spanning April through September, we reignited Downtown's music scene with free concerts in the Heart of Bellevue. Virtual shows were available on our website, and outdoor in-person concerts began July 7. In total, we produced 29 musical performances featuring over 50 local artists.

Virtual shows were pre-recorded from Brio Apartments and streamed every Wednesday from April 7 - June 30, 2021. Viewers watched the one-hour shows on Facebook or the BDA website. Outdoor concerts ran from July 7 – September 8, 2021. Venue locations included: Skyline Tower, Bellevue Square Fountain Court, The Spring District, Downtown Park Plaza, and Key Center.

Musical genres included Americana, Reggae, Vintage Pop, Folk, Country, Delta Blues, Flamenco Soul, and others.

Quick stats:

- **29 one-hour shows** featuring **50 local musicians**
- Artist lineup landing page received **11,342 pageviews**
- Stream Shows landing page and individual show pages received **10,985 pageviews**
- **24 dedicated emails** sent to 6,527 subscribers with 21.3% total opens

BELLEVUE 4TH OF JULY FIREWORKS (JUL. 4, 2021)

For the 28th year, fireworks lit up the sky over Downtown Bellevue for Independence Day. This year's show was the first public event in the city since March 2020. City of Bellevue staff, Bellevue PD and Bellevue Fire estimate that there were over 80,000 individuals attending the event, including neighboring viewers.

In addition to an in-person show, we also livestreamed the fireworks on bellevuedowntown.com. Over 11,000 people tuned in from a device to watch the 15-minute broadcast.

Quick stats:

- **64,190+ individuals** in Downtown Park, on perimeter properties and streets
- Grand total estimated closer to **80,000 individuals** with neighboring viewers
- Live Broadcast Views: **11k**
- Views to Date: **15.7k**
- Total Impressions: **29.8k**

BELLEVUE DOWNTOWN ARTS MARKET (SEPT. 4-6, 2021)

Previously known as the 6th Street Arts Fair, the Bellevue Downtown Arts Market took place over Labor Day weekend, Sept. 4-6, in Downtown Bellevue between NE 6th Street and 106th Avenue NE. In past years, the event took place in July as part of the award-winning Arts Fair Weekend alongside the Bellevue Arts Museum



(BAM) ARTSfair. Rather than produce a virtual marketplace, the BDA staff determined that moving the event to a later date was the best option to preserve an in-person experience and accommodate artist and public safety.

Overall, 110 local artists participated in their year's market. Live music also returned with 19 musicians performing music from around the world, including folk, blues, and flamenco guitar. Food trucks were also onsite.

Quick stats:

- **12,000+ individuals** estimated in attendance over the 3-day weekend
- **110 local artists** showcased their work
- **16,536 event + blog pageviews** on bellevuedowntown.com
- **4 dedicated emails** sent to 6,762 subscribers with 27.9% total open rate

JAZZ & BLUES MUSIC SERIES (OCT. 6-10, 2021)

From October 6-10, the Bellevue Downtown Association brought together top regional talent to Downtown Bellevue at the 14th Annual Bellevue Jazz & Blues Music Series. Featured artists Ray Vega, Thomas Marriott, Roy McCurdy, and Lady A performed at the Meydenbauer Center Theatre and other local talent was showcased at ten venues across Downtown Bellevue. In order to protect the health and safety of the community, we required proof of vaccine or a negative COVID-19 test for entry to the Meydenbauer Center shows. Masks were also required for audiences inside the theatre.

Attendees were encouraged to grab dinner from a local restaurant and watch a performance. Participating live music venues included Bake's Place Bar & Bistro, El Gaucho, AC Hotel Bellevue by Marriott, Lincoln Square North and South, Resonance at SOMA Towers, The Bellevue Arts Museum and Bellevue Place. A Student Showcase featuring local high school and middle school jazz combos took place at the Bellevue Arts Museum on October 10.

Quick stats:

- **24 live shows** featuring **80+ local musicians**
- **10 partner venues** hosted live music
- **14,438 event + blog pageviews** on bellevuedowntown.com
- **6 dedicated emails** sent to 2,083 subscribers with 51% total open rate

EFFORT #3 - PLACEMAKING

The BDA worked with local property owners and city officials to implement small-scale enhancements and place-branding elements across Downtown. Organizing our community members around the **care of the physical place** and overall livability provided the BDA with an active stakeholder body to turn to when tasked with larger scale conversations.



In 2021, the BDA executed multiple placemaking activations with key properties and businesses, including lanterns and banners along the Grand Connection, an "Al Fresco" outdoor dining program in Old Bellevue, and (soon-to-be installed) holiday lights in the Downtown Park.

YELLOW LANTERNS ALONG THE GRAND CONNECTION

For the past two years, the Bellevue Downtown Association has worked with property managers and businesses to hang colorful lanterns across Downtown Bellevue. This year, more lanterns were installed than ever before. More than 600 yellow lanterns lined the walk between the Bellevue Transit Center and Lincoln Square, hanging overhead in trees and strung from structures. Lanterns were also spotted along Bellevue Way, around the path at Downtown Park and into Old Bellevue. Lanterns were installed from June 24 - September 25, 2021.

AL FRESCO OUTDOOR DINING PROGRAM

Outdoor dining has been critical to many restaurants continuing their operations under COVID-19 capacity restrictions. This year, in partnership with Microsoft, the "Al Fresco" program returned to Downtown to help streamline permitting and identify creative spaces where businesses could safely expand their footprint and welcome more customers safely.

The outdoor dining program ran from May 20 – September 19, and helped revive foot traffic and activity along the corridor during crucial spring and summer months. In addition to the collective on-street expansion of space on Main Street, we promoted more than 40 other restaurants that offered outdoor dining across the city. A new content series, "Al Fresco Friday" also launched throughout the program, featuring local businesses each week.

To gauge the public's response to the extended outdoor dining areas on Main Street, City staff conducted a survey from September 1 to September 30 to solicit feedback. The tool was promoted by the BDA, Old Bellevue merchants, and on City communications channels (including a press release). In total, it garnered more than 250 responses. When survey respondents visited Main Street, they reported spending amounts that can have a substantial impact for local businesses. Almost 30% of respondents—the largest share—reported spending between \$101 and \$150 on their last visit to Main Street. The median spend hovered around \$150 per visit—typically at local restaurants, retailers, and service providers. Assuming this spend takes place at taxable locations, each visit to Main Street results in approximately \$1.50 in tax revenue to the city.

Across the board, survey respondents were satisfied with the outdoor dining areas, with 84% reporting a favorable experience and just 8% reporting some level of dissatisfaction. Concerns from the open-ended responses varied, but typically focused on the aesthetics of the water barriers, concerns about inadequate social distancing, and access concerns. Satisfaction varied slightly across groups, but for all respondent groups, more than 60% were satisfied with the experience. Shoppers and diners were most positive.



HOLIDAY LIGHT INSTALLATIONS

With the success of 2020's holiday light installation, we look forward to bringing back lights in Downtown Park, alongside the Bellevue Downtown Ice Rink. The BDA plans to install more than 2,200 dynamic LED holiday lights in the Downtown Park, creating a vibrant connection of lighting between The Bellevue Collection's re-imagined Snowflake Lane to Main Street in Old Bellevue.

EFFORT #4 – CITY COLLABORATION & KEY PARTNERS

Working with the City of Bellevue was crucial to the campaign's continued success. The BDA met with City staff regularly to cross-promote messaging, generate stories, and streamline the permitting process for small businesses. From bi-weekly meetings with the Economic Development team, to engagement with City review/permitting staff, to regularly partnering with the City Communications team to amplify messaging, we made sure to collaborate as much as possible with this key partner.

Working with the City of Bellevue allowed for better lead generation for Downtown stories and kept the line of communication open as things evolved. Philly Marsh, Economic Development Manager, provided many business referrals for Downtown stories. Michelle DeGrand, Deputy Communications Officer, was essential for cross-promoting messaging across the City's channels and ours. We also met with Mark Heilman and Julie Ellenhorn from the Neighborhood Outreach Team to discuss future ways of partnering and connecting with the residents in Bellevue through our programming.

In addition to the City of Bellevue, we partnered with several key organizations to cast a wide net and stretch the message to support our city's core. This included retailers and institutions, such as Visit Bellevue, The Bellevue Collection, Downtown Bellevue Network, The Bravern, Bellevue Library, KidsQuest Children's Museum, Old Bellevue Merchants Association, and the Bellevue Arts Museum.

We also leveraged private property owners, businesses and private contributions to partner in the marketing and activation efforts. Our supporting sponsors for the Heart of Bellevue campaign included **Amazon**, the **City of Bellevue**, **Microsoft**, and **Puget Sound Energy**. We could not have done this work without their generous support.

Key Takeaways

In times of stress, the resilience of local economies and their small businesses is closely connected to the presence and strength of local partner organizations with the capacity to reach and support them with connections to available resources, programming and advocacy. **The ability to connect with and provide ground-level support to Downtown Bellevue businesses has proven essential** to assess needs and ensure the broadest reach with available resources.

Ground level-implementation of **placemaking activations in the public realm is critical, but challenging, tedious, and time-intensive work**. It requires extensive relationship building with property owners, small



businesses and residents, and dedicated resources to be successful. Even the smallest of public realm activations requires skilled staff, time and money.

Cities that are truly committed to creating vibrant, active places don't do it alone. They rely on partnerships and **invest in growing the capacity of local organizations to help support placemaking goals**. This will be especially critical for the Grand Connection due to the fact that the majority of the route consists of private property.

Next Steps

Throughout the campaign, the BDA was able to build connections, engage the community, and support economic recovery. We will continue to support and align with the City of Bellevue's adopted Economic Development Plan. We look forward to:

1. Larger strategic planning effort with stakeholders
2. Involving the City in the planning process
3. Continuing small business outreach and recovery support
4. Residential outreach and strategy

THANK YOU
FOR YOUR CONTINUED PARTNERSHIP
