Quality of Life in Bellevue

What makes a healthy, vibrant community? For most people, it’s usually a combination of factors — some very tangible, like high-quality public services, restaurants and shops, beautiful parks and beaches, or good schools; some factors are part of a personal perception, such as feelings about safety, helping neighbors in need, or civic engagement. Residents who participated in the phone/online and consumer surveys rated their satisfaction with living in Bellevue. In many of the Community Conversations, participants commented about the quality of their lives here. Other departments in the city such as Planning and Community Development through its Neighborhood Outreach Program and the Finance Department, through its Performance Measures and Budget surveys, and Parks and Community Services Department also ask residents their opinions about Bellevue’s livability and its health as a city.

This section of the Needs Update:
• summarizes key findings from the phone/online survey and qualitative information from other sources indicating how residents perceive Bellevue’s quality of life
• describes other efforts in the city that seek to increase the city’s livability during a time of enormous growth
• details what community issues are of most concern to residents.

Perception of the Quality of Life in Bellevue

• Nearly all (96%) respondents to the phone/online survey said the quality of life in their community was either “excellent” (49%) or “good” (47%). Though overall satisfaction is slightly down from 2011 when it was 98%, it should be noted that in 2013, the “excellent” ratings increased and the “good” ratings slightly decreased. In both the phone and online survey, certain factors affected whether people rated their community as an excellent place to live. On a scale of 0–10, respondents aged 65 and older are significantly more likely (8.8) than residents between 35 and 54 to consider their community an excellent place to live (8.29) and 55 to 64 (8.45).

• Surveys conducted by the City for other purposes also found similar results. For example, in the 2012 Budget Survey, the majority of respondents (98%) said the quality of life in the city is good to excellent, and 96% rated the quality of their own neighborhood as “good” or “excellent”. In the 2013 Performance Survey, 94% of respondents said the quality of life exceeds or greatly exceeds their expectations, and 93% rated their neighborhood as either an “excellent” or “good” place to live.

• In the 2010 Parks Plan survey, virtually all Bellevue residents have a positive view of the quality of life in the City (98%). In fact, ratings are evenly divided between those that say the quality of life is “excellent” and those that give it a “good” rating. Nearly all Bellevue residents (97%) believe the parks and recreation opportunities in Bellevue positively affect the overall quality of life here; 67% say that these opportunities “greatly enhance” it.

• The Human Services consumer survey also asked respondents about satisfaction with
living in the community. In 2013, nearly 88% of respondents to the consumer survey rated Bellevue as “good” or “excellent”, slightly more than the 85% who rated it as such in 2011. This is a large increase from prior years; between 1999-2005, only about 80% of respondents rated living in Bellevue as “good” or “excellent”.

Community Assets
Bellevue residents identified some of the community’s assets in written comments on the consumer surveys and in the Community Conversations. These assets include:
- Diversity especially in the Crossroads area
- Clean city, including streets and parks
- Safety, low crime rate
- Good social services
- Very good schools
- Community Centers
- Green environment
- Great place for families

Connectedness in Bellevue Communities
It is no surprise that Bellevue has won many awards for its excellence. For example, Bellevue was named by Money Magazine as one of the top 100 places to live in 2012, 2010, 2008 and 2006 and in 2012, 2011, 2010, 2007, and 2006, the America Promise Alliance named Bellevue one of the best 100 communities for young people. In order to keep up these high standards, the City of Bellevue has a number of ongoing efforts to ensure that its residents have a voice in what they need in their communities in order to keep the quality of life as high as it is now. Some of these are described below.

The City’s Neighborhood Outreach Program
Bellevue has 16 distinct neighborhood areas with unique histories, character and neighborhood amenities. Neighborhood Outreach works with neighborhood leaders and residents to build up the health, livability and community connections that make Bellevue such a great place to live. The City of Bellevue prioritizes strengthening the quality of life in our neighborhoods through our Neighborhood Outreach programming and services. A few examples include:

Neighborhood Liaisons: Sometimes it helps to have a connection with someone who knows the City, the neighborhoods and the community resources that are available. Neighborhood liaisons are assigned to each of the 16 unique neighborhood areas and provide assistance for resident questions, connection to available resources and support to help strengthen neighborhood associations and improve City responsiveness to neighborhood concerns.

The Neighborhood Match Program: This program partners with neighborhoods on enhancement projects such as entry signs, landscaping and art projects. The Program provides matching grants up to $10,000 for small-scale neighborhood improvements. Neighbors provide in-kind donations, cash, professional services, building materials, and volunteer labor. For the past 20 years, the program has funded hundreds of local improvement projects in Bellevue neighborhoods that have beautified the city and enhanced its livability.

Neighborhood Forums: Throughout the year, Neighborhood Outreach provides workshops and forums to deepen our understanding and community conversation on the major issues that impact our lives. The topics in 2013 included “Keeping our Kids Safe in our Community” and “Climate Change and our Community”. Each forum provides avenues to learn more and action steps that we can take to strengthen the health and vitality of our neighborhoods.

Mini-City Hall: Since 1997, the Crossroads Mini City Hall (MCH) has become an information and service hub for east Bellevue residents. Located in the Crossroads Shopping Center, MCH is open six days a week with team of staff and volunteers who speak 12 languages, including Spanish, Chinese, Russian, Farsi and Turkish. MCH provides information about city programs and services and partners with many non-profit organizations and public agencies to bring needed services to Bellevue residents
in the areas of human services, employment, health care, interpretation and civic engagement.

“Crossroad of Mini City Hall did very good job for local people. Hope to keep this location continuing to service us. I feel more comfortable to have service here than the Downtown City Hall.”

*Consumer Survey*

**Bellevue Essentials:** This eight-week leadership class provides an overview of the inner workings of city government. Interactive classes cover Bellevue history, diversity, arts, parks, neighborhoods, planning, transportation and more. This new onramp for emerging leaders helps develop leaders for broader public service and will provide knowledge, skills and community connections that are helpful for effective civic engagement.

**Downtown Livability Initiative**
The Downtown Livability initiative is a targeted review of regulations that guide development and land use activity within Downtown Bellevue. As the City readies itself for upcoming development cycles, this will be the most extensive Code update since the adoption of the original Downtown Land Use Code in 1981. Begun in late 2012, the project is using a 15-person Advisory Committee (mix of City board and commission members and community representatives) to develop recommendations relating to topics such as building height and form, desired public amenities, pedestrian circulation, public open space, parking, and allowed uses. The objectives are to: better achieve the vision for Downtown Bellevue as a vibrant, mixed-use center; enhance the pedestrian experience; improve the area as a residential setting; enhance identity and character; and integrate elements from the companion transportation plan update and East Link design work. Downtown Bellevue is becoming an exciting place to work, shop, visit, or call home. It is also very important to the entire City from a growth and development perspective.

The Downtown Livability Initiative seeks to involve a broad range of community stakeholders. This includes residents from throughout the City in addition to Downtown and nearby residents, property owners and developers, business groups and organizations, the Downtown workforce, and other users of Downtown. A key element of the project is engaging all interested parties to understand what is working well, and where there is room for improvement, or new opportunities. This will help ensure that the City maintains all the appropriate Code elements, and focus changes on areas needing improvement and new opportunities as the City moves forward. Ultimate adoption of Code amendments by Council is anticipated to occur in the 2014 timeframe.

**Bellevue Diversity Initiative**
This initiative explores the connections between diversity in Bellevue and economic development, human services, education, public safety, cultural competence and civic engagement. In the four roundtables conducted in Spring 2013, participants consistently commented that cultural competence service delivery by community service providers is a high priority and bilingual bi-cultural staff is an effective and productive method of providing the service. Another priority was that Bellevue needs more spaces and places where intercultural interaction and education are available. Many community members have asked that the City serve as a convener and facilitator on the subject of diversity, and provide more opportunities for outreach to and civic engagement of the growing diverse community in Bellevue.

**Diversity Focus Group**
The Diversity Focus Group (DFG) is comprised of a group of concerned and involved community members that are committed to improving the relationship between the Bellevue Police Department (BPD) and the diverse community that makes up the great City of Bellevue. The Group does this by:

- Sharing ideas with the Chief of Police on how best to build bridges
- Offering a community perspective
- Promoting public awareness
- Educating the police
- Helping recruit diverse candidates for the Police Department

"Crossroad of Mini City Hall did very good job for local people. Hope to keep this location continuing to service us. I feel more comfortable to have service here than the Downtown City Hall."
2013 Accomplishments and upcoming work
• With DFG input, developed a brochure in several languages on what to do if contracted by a police officer
• Helped sponsor the forum at Sammamish High School on youth and drug abuse
• Several DFG members participated in the citywide diversity initiative
• DFG sponsored a forum on crime prevention in October 2013
• Some key DFG members helped diffuse some negative Seattle community reaction to a BPD SWAT related shooting by sharing the facts with community members.

Perception of Safety in Neighborhoods and Downtown
According to the 2012 Bellevue Police Department Annual Report, positive perceptions of safety by Bellevue residents in all areas have remained steady since 2011. In the 2012 City Performance Measures Survey Report, the Eastgate/Cougar Mountain and Wilburton neighborhoods are rated as the two safest in general. Eastgate/Cougar Mountain is also rated as the safest neighborhood after dark. In 2011 and in 2012, 45% of survey respondents rated “walking alone in the downtown business area after dark” as very safe. In the same survey, in 2012, just under three-quarters (71%) of residents who had contact with the police reported a positive experience. This percentage is down somewhat compared to 2011 when 81% of the respondents reported a positive experience.

Perception of Community Problem Areas in Bellevue
In the phone/online survey, respondents rated 35 potential problem areas as to whether they felt these were problems for individuals and families in the community. A new “community issue” question was last added in 2005: People not knowing how to manage their personal finances. In 2011 two existing problem areas were expanded to more accurately capture the community’s concern: both “Crime and violence in the community” and “Shortage of recreation facilities or programs” were split into two questions. When interpreting these ratings it is important to note that these reflect people’s perceptions and not necessarily actual prevalence of problems. A variety of factors (e.g. local or national media attention, positive or negative personal experiences) may affect respondents’ ratings. Additionally, the term “your community” was not defined in the survey, and how respondents’ interpretation of this phrase likely varied.

The majority of phone/online survey respondents in 2013 (53%) rated at least 5 of the 35 problems mentioned as moderate or major in the community. This is similar to 2011 results when 55% rated 5 or more moderate or major problems in the community. Twenty-nine percent of respondents felt there were more than 10 moderate or major problems in their community, significantly lower than in 2011 when 40% said there were more than 10 problem areas. Overall, respondents identified an average of 7.9 issues as major or moderate problems for their community. This is significantly lower than the 2011 average of 10.0 major/moderate problems. One can speculate that the improving economy had an effect on this lower rating.

“No buses scheduled within a mile of my house - have brace and difficult to walk to bus”
Phone/Online Survey Participant

“It’s hard to get around. The buses are not predictable and do not run long enough at night.”
Community Conversation, English Language Learners Alliance

There are four areas that can be considered among the top tier of most frequent problem areas in the community. These areas, listed below, received a “major” or “moderate” problem rating from at least 3 out of 10 respondents (30%):
• Lack of affordable housing (51%)
• Lack of affordable medical insurance (41%)
• Lack of affordable medical care (40%)
• Inadequate public transportation (35%)
major and moderate problem ratings; 5 of the 6 problems that have placed in the top tier of problems in every survey for the last ten years in this category include:

- Lack of affordable housing
- Lack of affordable medical insurance
- Lack of affordable medical care
- People not having jobs that pay for the basics
- Lack of affordable dental care

Two other top tier community problems—lack of affordable medical insurance and lack of affordable medical care—had significant increases over the past two years (25% and 24% respectively) but not in 2013, in which they both had a significant decrease. Again, one can speculate that the news coverage of the improving economy, the passage of the Affordable Care Act, and/or the lower unemployment rate were all factors in respondents rating these problems lower in 2013 than in 2011.

Of the 35 community problems, 13 were considered not a problem or a minor problem by a majority of respondents. These included: shortage of recreational programs (75%), shortage of recreational facilities (74%), poor quality education K-12 (72%) and violence in the community (69%).

**Difference in Prevalence of Community Problems between Survey Years**

Between 2011 and 2013, there were 20 problem areas with significant decreases in the perceived prevalence of major and moderate problems, compared to 19 that had significant increases between 2009 and 2011. (A detailed table of community problem areas listed in descending order by rating and statistical significance is included in Appendix A.) The large decrease in the number of problems with significant decreases is likely attributable to a more positive public perception of the economy in general. These issues will be explored in more depth in other sections of this report.

**Perception of Community Members’ Accessibility to Services**

As shown in the chart on the next page, a majority (55%), of the 2013 phone/online survey respondents, believes...
that people in their community have adequate access to services. This is lower, though not significantly, than 2011 when 61% believed there was adequate access. Furthermore, the percentage of respondents saying they were unsure if there was adequate increased though not significantly in 2013 compared to 2011. Those responding online were significantly more likely than phone respondents to say they were unsure. This is most likely due to the demographic differences between these two segments: online users tended to be newer residents in Bellevue. The 69 (9%) individuals indicating there is inadequate access, were asked what services they believe people have difficulty accessing. The most commonly mentioned are needs for housing services (16 comments), for health care service needs (13 comments), counseling/mental health (9 comments), services for seniors (8 comments), general lack of information about available services (7 comments), food and shelter for the homeless (5 comments) and employment services and transportation (each 4 comments). While in the past six surveys conducted, lack of general information regarding services was mentioned as one of the top two areas that people have difficulty accessing, in 2013, it was only mentioned by 7 respondents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Service</th>
<th>Number of Replies (n-69 or 9%)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Housing Services</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Care/Medical</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counseling/Mental Health</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elder Care/Services for Seniors</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of General Information about Services</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food and Shelter for the Homeless</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services for Immigrants or non-English speaking residents</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Groups of Residents That Tend to Perceive More Problems in the Community

Based on 2013 phone/online survey findings, certain segments of the population tend to perceive more problem areas as moderate or major problems in their communities. These include:

- Residents aged 55-64 years and age 65 and older
- Households with incomes of less than $25,000
- Women
- Residents who receive public assistance
- Resident who have not recently immigrated to the US
- Residents who have members of the military living at home

The more problems experienced in residents’ households the higher the average number of problems rated as major or moderate in the community as the chart on the next page shows.
Because it is not possible to determine why these differences exist through speculation alone, we also engage community members from these populations to gain additional information. For example, comments from those who may have been underrepresented in the phone/online survey (e.g. people who speak English as their second language, youth, people living in low-income households) have been obtained through Community Conversations, consumer surveys and key informant interviews.

**Other Problem Areas Perceived to Exist in the Community**

During the past seven survey cycles, an increasing number of respondents reported that there were no other problems in the community than those listed in the survey. In 2001, 73% reported that there were no other problems, and in 2003, 2005, 2007 and 2009 roughly 80% stated this. When asked this same question in 2011, 80% of respondents still reported that there were no other problems in the community.

**Questions D1A to D1H:** Using a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 means “your community does not support the needs of the population at all” and 10 means “your community completely supports the needs of the population” please indicate to what degree you feel your community supports the needs of each of the following population groups.

- Indicates a statistically significant increase in the 2013 average over the 2011 average.
only 52% said there were no other problems, and 32% stated that they “didn’t know.” In 2013, 84% answered either “no” (35%) or they said they were “unsure” (49%). The percentage answering “yes” is about the same as in 2011 (15%). Some of the top problems listed by those answering “yes” included homelessness, racial discrimination, and alcohol and drug abuse. Others less frequently mentioned were education, youth and mental health.

Community Support
In 2009, a series of questions were added to the survey assessing the level to which the community supports the needs of specific populations. Residents indicated the degree to which the community supports certain population segments on a scale from 1-10. In 2013, these questions were also included in the phone/online survey. As seen in the chart on the previous page, there were significantly higher mean ratings for all population segments except for low-income families and low-income individuals in 2013 compared to 2011.