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**Date:** January 4, 2016  
**To:** Parks & Community Services Board  
**From:** Camron Parker, Senior Planner  
Parks & Community Services  
**Subject:** Parks & Open Space System Plan Final Edits

At the November meeting, the Board recommended approval of the 2016 update to the Parks & Open Space System Plan. The approval was given with an amendment directing three changes to wording in the plan. Attached is a clip from the meeting minutes with the amendments agreed upon by the Board (you can also reference the full set of meeting minutes in the January meeting packet for additional context). Following that are the two chapters in which changes were made to satisfy those amendments. Edits are shown in strike-out and underline format.

In the *City in a Park* chapter, you will see changed language near the front of the document in the Economic Diversity section. Near the end of the chapter, you will find clarifying edits regarding the Mercer Slough Nature Park land acquisition and the Bridle Trails land acquisition projects.

In the *Policy Framework* chapter, you will see edits that strengthen the language around open space preservation and protection. There are two changes to note. First, in the Goals section, words are re-ordered so that “protect” comes at the beginning and applies to everything following in that sentence. Below that are more text changes to the Balanced Stewardship section. Additionally, changes are found in the Environmental Stewardship and Education section to supplement environmental education with more types of active support and assistance to Bellevue property owners.

These changes were reviewed and approved by the Chair and Vice-Chair. This concludes the Parks & Community Services Board’s work on this edition of the Parks & Open Space System Plan. The plan will now proceed to City Council review and approval in the coming months. If you have any questions about the plan and the final changes, please contact me at (425) 452-2032 or [cparker@bellevuewa.gov](mailto:cparker@bellevuewa.gov) prior to the January meeting.

**Motion by Boardmember Van Hollebeke and second by Vice-Chair Grindeland to make the following amendments to the 2016 update to the Bellevue Parks & Open Space System Plan:**

- **In the “Policy Framework” section add clarifying language regarding: advocate and champion preservation of open space, tree canopy, and aquatic habitat with the public, other governmental agencies, corporations, organizations, and private land owners.**
- **In the “Policy Framework” section add clarifying language regarding: partner and provide assistance to Bellevue landowners to preserving and developing open space and thriving ecosystem functions through incentives, best practice examples, and guidance.**
- **In the “A City in a Park” section, add clarifying language regarding: Mercer Slough East Link mitigation project and more detail regarding the Bridle Trails land acquisition.**

**At the question, motion carried unanimously (6-0) to approve the amendments to the 2016 update to the Bellevue Parks & Open Space System Plan.**

(Boardmember Heath departed at 8:41 p.m.)

**At the question, motion carried unanimously (5-0) to recommend that the City Council approve the 2016 update to the Bellevue Parks & Open Space System Plan as amended.**

Boardmembers would like to review the final Bellevue Parks & Open Space System Plan at the January, 2016 Board meeting.

C. Re-Naming Facility in Honor of Nan Campbell

*Postponed.*

10. **BOARDMEMBER COMMITTEE/LIAISON REPORTS:**

None.

11. **NEW BUSINESS:**

A. Future agenda items

None.

12. **OTHER COMMUNICATIONS:**

A. CIP Project Status Report

# Bellevue, A City in a Park

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## Community Profile

The [City of Bellevue](#) is the fifth largest city in Washington. Bellevue's 2015 resident population is 135,000. During the daytime, Bellevue's estimated population is 233,300, which includes the daily influx of workers, students and other visitors, such as retail shoppers.

A detailed profile of the Bellevue community is available in the [Bellevue Human Services Needs Update](#). This document is published every two years by Parks & Community Services and includes the most recent demographic information available at the time on the make-up of Bellevue residents. Demographic characteristics include age, gender, race/ethnicity, housing status, language and household income. Comparisons are provided to other regional and national places as well as comparisons between Bellevue neighborhoods. A summary of select population components is provided below for easy reference. The following data are based on the U.S. Census Bureau's 2009-2013 and 2013 [American Community Survey](#) data sets.

## Households

- There were an estimated 55,922 households in Bellevue in 2015, with an average of 2.45 persons per household, remaining steady at 2.41 in 2010 and up from 2.37 in 2000. The most common household types in 2011-2013 were married couples without children (30.3%) and single person households (26.5%).
- The percentage of households with children was slightly lower in Bellevue (29.2%) than in Redmond (31.1%), and was comparable to the percentage of households with children in the U.S. (29.0%), Washington state (28.7%) and Kirkland (29.1%). Bellevue's percentage of households with children was markedly higher than Seattle's (19.1%).

## Racial and Ethnic Diversity

- Since 1990, the proportion of race and ethnic groups other than White in Bellevue has nearly tripled from about 14.7 percent of the population in 1990 to 28.3% in 2000 and finally 40.8% in 2010.
- Bellevue is more racially diverse than King County as a whole, as well as more diverse than other large cities in the county, including Seattle, Redmond and Kirkland.
- The current racial/ethnic make-up of Bellevue is 71.8% White, 17.4% Asian, 5.3% Hispanic, 1.9% Black, 2.9% two or more races, 0.2 % some other race, 0.2% Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, and 0.3% American Indian and Alaskan Native.
- According to the Bellevue School District, 87 different first languages other than English were spoken at home during the 2014-15 school year.

## Economic ~~Well-Being~~Diversity

- Bellevue's median household income during 2011-2013 (\$91,260) was the 9th highest of Washington's 62 large places. Bellevue also had the 8th highest median family income (\$103,242) and the 8th highest percentage of families with incomes of \$200,000 or more (18.8%).
- While median household income has been increasing, so too has the percent of Bellevue residents living in poverty and more than one quarter of Bellevue households have incomes less than \$50,000.
- In 2014-15, 19% of students in the Bellevue School District qualified for free- and reduced-price lunch assistance. This percentage has remained stable over the past decade. However, the number of homeless students enrolled spiked from 48 in 2007 to 228 in 2013.
- Of Washington's 62 largest places, in 2009-2013 Bellevue had the 6th highest percentage of residents 25 and over with a bachelor's degree or higher (62%) and 59 percent of Bellevue's civilian employed population were employed in management, professional, or related occupations

## Older Adults

- The percentage of Bellevue's older adult population increased from 10.4% in 1990 to 13.4% in 2000, to 14.0% in 2011-2013. Bellevue had the largest proportion of older adults (13.9%) compared to other jurisdictions.

## Youth

- While Bellevue had a smaller proportion of school age children (17.5%) than the U.S. (20.4%), state (10.8%), and county (17.7%), the city had a larger proportion of school age children than Redmond (16.2%), Kirkland (14.7%) and Seattle (12.9%). Bellevue had the largest proportion of older adults (13.9%) compared to other jurisdictions.

## Individuals with Disabilities

- Approximately 8% of Bellevue's population 5 years and older reported having a disability in 2010-2012, with 10,800 residents noting at least one disability. The different disabilities included the following: hearing (17%), vision (8%), cognitive (11%), ambulatory (22%), self-care (8%), and independent living (17%).

## Natural Resource Characteristics

Bellevue's natural environment, rich with forests, wetlands, and riparian stream corridors, defines the city and make it unique. Four major stream systems — Kelsey Creek (which includes Mercer Slough, Lake Bellevue, Kelsey Creek, Larsen Lake, Phantom Lake, West Tributary, Valley Creek, and Richards Creek), Coal Creek, Vasa Creek, and Lewis Creek — carry surface water to either Lake Washington or Lake Sammamish. Stream corridors are a backbone of Bellevue's greenways and natural areas. They contribute to the wide plant and animal diversity existing throughout the park system and in many larger wetland complexes, such as Mercer Slough and Lake Hills Greenbelt. While Bellevue has a strong

history of preserving open streams, there are many opportunities to restore stream corridors that were placed in pipes as the city developed. Restoring these streams and their associated habitat is a high priority.

Bellevue's urban forest climbs from the shores of Lake Washington and Lake Sammamish up 1,500 feet in elevation to the top of Cougar Mountain. With 14 miles of waterfront between the two major lakes, the city is a waterfront community with opportunities for water-related recreation activities.

The city's topographic variations result in spectacular views of mountains, water, and urban areas. It is not surprising that Bellevue residents have placed a high priority on retaining open space and natural areas. When asked as part of the 2015 Bellevue park user survey, 63% of Bellevue residents reported that it is important or very important for the City to prioritize funding to improve the health and ecological function of forests, wetlands, lakes and streams. A beautiful and highly functioning natural environment is one of the many reasons residents choose to live here.

Public stewardship of these natural areas through preservation and restoration is a key element in the park system plan. Over many decades, the city has prioritized acquisition of these undeveloped forests, wetlands and riparian stream corridors. Many of these critical areas are privately owned. As the population of Bellevue continues to grow, remaining environmentally sensitive areas will experience increased development pressure. The City's interest in acquiring and preserving critical areas must remain at a high level.

The City's role in protecting and enhancing these natural systems has become increasingly important for the City to comply with federal and state environmental regulations, such as the Endangered Species Act, the National Pollution Discharge Elimination System Permit, the state Shoreline Master Program and the Growth Management Act (GMA) Best Available Science requirement to protect critical areas.

### **Forest and Wetland Resources**

All neighborhood areas of Bellevue still have remnant second and third growth stands of native trees. When last measured, the city-wide tree canopy cover was 36 percent. The Bellevue Comprehensive Plan sets a target to increase that coverage to 40 percent (policy EN-12). This is important in maintaining linkages between public and private land holdings and results in enhanced opportunities for wildlife, as well as recreational, educational activities and the aesthetics that contribute to Bellevue's image as a "City in a Park".

A number of year-round and intermittent streams and groundwater drainage systems contribute to the City's native wetland habitat. Wetland functions include flood water attenuation, stream base flow maintenance and groundwater support, water quality improvement, erosion and shoreline protection, wildlife habitat, and opportunities for passive recreation, education, and open space.

### **Wildlife Habitat**

As stewards of Bellevue's public open spaces, Parks & Community Services is committed to native wildlife preservation through preserving areas that provide food, habitat and travel/migration corridors essential for wildlife survival. Habitat types in Bellevue include the following general categories: stream

corridors with riparian and associated wetland habitats, lowland forest and steep slopes, forested and herbaceous wetland and open water, and agriculture, pasture, mixed and urban environments. Habitat studies by the State, King County and City provide a baseline for effective wildlife habitat policy for Bellevue. Inherent in this policy is the recognition of our responsibility to preserve, protect and enhance habitat areas and wildlife corridors on both public and private land.

The City of Bellevue's Critical Areas Ordinance has established policies which protect habitat functions and values. These land use regulations apply to both public and private land in Bellevue. However, critical area restrictions alone do not provide a guarantee of habitat preservation. Continued private development has a cumulative adverse impact on wildlife, so the city's parks and open space system plays an increasingly important role in providing and protecting wildlife habitats and corridors. This outcome is met through proactive property acquisition, enhancement and restoration of key wildlife habitat or corridor areas.

### **Shoreline Resources**

Bellevue's 14 miles of shoreline along Lake Washington and Lake Sammamish are valuable recreational and aesthetic resources. Despite proximity to this resource, total shoreline in public ownership is approximately 1.6 miles (12%), with the majority on Lake Washington. There is one small undeveloped site on Lake Sammamish within city limits. As a waterfront community, there is a high level of interest in water-related recreational activities. In the course of one year on average, 61% of Bellevue residents will visit a beach park or boat launch at least twice and one in three Bellevue residents will visit at least six times or more in a year. Bellevue shorelines are a focus for swimming, fishing, boating, sunbathing, and picnicking. The shoreline area also provides intangible benefits such as aesthetic enjoyment, ecological interest, historic and cultural enrichment, and spiritual renewal. Responding to the community's long-held desire for additional public water access, the City remains strongly committed to providing additional public waterfront access opportunities.

### **Parks & Open Space Inventory and Program Statistics**

Bellevue's parks system includes 98 developed park sites. Within these parks are 100 buildings totaling 267,000 square feet, 20 ballfields and 11 soccer (or multi-use) fields. Four large multi-use community centers and several smaller centers serve different geographic areas of the city and offer services targeting specific population groups.

Bellevue's open space system includes 2,700 acres of forests and natural areas. The open space system includes over 85 miles of multi-use trails, 10,000 street trees maintained along 214 acres of streetscapes. Included within the open space system are three community farms and 100 community garden plots (P-patches). Four visitor centers provide community outreach and environmental education programming.

Through the Recreation Division, the parks system provides opportunities for sports, visual and performing arts, special community events, after-school and summer day camps and life-long learning skills. These programs lead to over 700,000 interactions with program participants annually. Finally,

through the Department's Human Services Division, funding partnerships are maintained with 45 non-profit agencies to support 72 different programs serving the needs of low- and moderate-income Bellevue residents.

## Use of the Parks & Open Space System

In September 2015, nearly 575 Bellevue residents completed a random sample [Parks & Community Services Survey](#). A representative sample of citizens provided information about their use of the parks system, priorities for future park system development and questions about their fitness habits and recreation preferences. Seventy-two percent of residents who report visiting one or more types of Bellevue parks or recreation facilities at least 10 times per year, and 95 percent of respondents rate Bellevue's quality of life positively.

According to the survey, the facilities used most frequently by adult respondents are: trails through forests, wetlands or other natural areas (77%); open areas for unstructured play or picnicking (70%); parks with display gardens (64%); and community beaches (61%). A separate question asked about the facilities used most frequently by children under eighteen. They are: open areas for unstructured play or picnicking (87%); trails through forests, wetlands or other natural areas (78%); community beaches, waterfront parks or boat launches (78%); playgrounds (80%); and outdoor sports fields or sports courts (70%).

The statistics show a correlation between the number of facilities available to the public and the use of those facilities. For example, Bellevue's extensive local trail system is readily available and easily accessible to many residents. Similarly, Bellevue has a geographically distributed network of parks and playgrounds offering open areas for unstructured recreation for neighborhood use. Since these facilities are readily accessible for many residents, it is not surprising that these types of park facilities are used most frequently by a high percentage of residents. More specialized, less geographically centralized facilities such as the one designated off-leash dog area and one publicly-owned pool are used less frequently. The visitation survey results likely would be higher if these facilities were more in number and geographically dispersed.

When asked how they use the facilities, respondents most commonly said they use them to relax (70%), to enjoy or experience nature and open spaces (69%), and to exercise (60%), and to spend time with family and friends (60%). Most respondents (76%) said they use the parks and facilities mostly as an individual or for family activities, 6% use them mostly as part of an organized sports league or recreation group and 9% use them equally for both purposes.

Sixty-seven percent of respondents report exercising at least three times a week overall. Respondents split into three groups with respect to preferred exercise setting. Thirty-six percent of residents typically exercise indoors, 33% exercise both indoors and outdoors environment and 27% spend their time indoors.

## Capital Projects Undertaken Since 2010

The Parks & Open Space System Plan includes a 20-year vision for future acquisition and capital project priorities. The pace of change is rapid in Bellevue, so the 20-year list is revisited every six years to determine if new information warrants a course correction. The first step in that process is to review the progress made toward achieving the objectives of the last Parks & Open Space System Plan (2010). The following lists identify the significant projects completed since adoption of that plan.

### Open Space, Greenways, Wildlife Corridors & Trails

- Completed 6 acre wetland enhancement project at the Lake Hills Greenbelt.
- Completed forest habitat and restoration at Lakemont, Springhills and Airfield Park greenbelts.
- Completed Woodridge-McTavish trail system and pathway connection to the Lake Hills Connector – SE 9<sup>th</sup> PL to SE 8<sup>th</sup> and the Lake to Lake Trail.
- Worked cooperatively with Bellevue Transportation and WSDOT on the design of the Mountains to Sound Greenway Trail (Phase 1) from Factoria to I-90 Eastgate.
- Completed the renovation of the Coal Creek Natural Area trail system including:
  - 4.5 of trail surface grading and repair
  - Replaced 9 bridges and two stairway systems
  - Completed the Cinder Mines Trailhead on Lakemont Boulevard
  - Completed the new bridge and pedestrian underpass at Coal Creek Parkway in partnership with Bellevue Utilities
- Completed the Sunrise Trailhead on West Lake Sammamish Parkway SE.

### Park Facilities

- Acquired 10 acres in Newport Hills for open space and a neighborhood park in Newport Hills, with park plan development under way.
- Acquired 2 acres in Bridle Trails and constructed Bridle Trails Corner Park, funded by the 2008 parks levy.
- Acquired 8.2 acres in BelRed in partnership with Utilities and Transportation for future park and stream restoration supporting BelRed redevelopment.
- Acquired 14.4 acres of open space to add to Eastgate Park.
- Acquired 0.4 acres at NE 2nd Street in Downtown Bellevue for future use as a neighborhood park.
- Acquired a 6.2 acres property in Mercer Slough Nature Park that had previously bisected the park as part of the compensation and mitigation for East Link light rail's permanent use of approximately 3 acres of parkland adjacent to Bellevue Way SE. A new trail section constructed on the newly acquired property allows for an interior connection between the Mercer Slough Environmental Education Center and the Bellefield Loop Trail.
- Acquired 1.65 acres in Bridle Trails ~~that intended to provide a new neighborhood park adjacent to, together with adjacent~~ open space property owned by Bellevue Utilities ~~will provide a neighborhood park and preserved open space~~

## Active Recreation Facilities

- Completed construction on the Lewis Creek Park Picnic Area and new trail connections.
- Finished design and construction of the new Bellevue Youth Theatre, with the facility earning LEED Gold environmental building design designation.
- Completed new synthetic sportsfield projects at Newport Hills Park and Bannerwood Park.
- Completed the Bellevue Botanical Garden's new 8,500 square foot visitor center and suspension bridge.
- Completed a project at Hidden Valley Park in partnership with the Boys and Girls Club including a new multi-purpose gymnasium, located adjacent to the lighted ball field, a modest parking lot expansion, sports field improvements (synthetic field conversions) and the addition of a fourth baseball field.
- Completed the new double-deck driving range at the Bellevue Golf Course.

## Waterfront Access

- Removed six houses in preparation for the first phase of development for Meydenbauer Bay Park. Design for the first phase is nearing completion.
- Completed 14 revenue-generating boat slips for visitor moorage at the Meydenbauer Bay Marina.

# Parks & Community Services Policy Framework

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***What's New for 2016***

- Aligned references to vision, goal and policies of the 2015 Bellevue Comprehensive Plan Update
- Edited Parks & Open Space System Plan Goals

Decisions on the preservation of open space and development of the park and trail system in Bellevue are guided by two primary documents, the Bellevue Comprehensive Plan and this Parks & Open Space System Plan. The Comprehensive Plans provides the overall framework and the Parks & Open Space System Plan provides more specific goals and objectives designed to advance the community’s vision for parks, recreation and open space.

## Comprehensive Plan Vision, Goal and Policies

**Bellevue is a City in a Park.**

*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.*

This is the Parks, Recreation and Open Space Vision adopted by the City as part of its Comprehensive Plan. Like most municipalities in Washington, Bellevue maintains and regularly updates a [Comprehensive Plan](#). The most recent update was adopted by the City Council in August 2015.

As described in the plan’s Introduction, the “Comprehensive Plan is the city’s foundational policy document that guides growth and development for the next twenty years... The Comprehensive Plan sets out the community’s vision for the future, lays out a groundwork of planning policies to guide city actions, and provides a framework so that city departments and community organizations work together toward common goals.”

The Parks, Recreation and Open Space Element of the plan holds the high level policies that direct the actions of the Parks & Community Services department. There are 37 policies in all grouped by subject areas including the Parks and Open Space System, Recreation and Community Services, Stewardship and Maintenance, Renovation and Redevelopment. The 37 policies are led by a singular goal, which not coincidentally, is the department’s mission statement.

**Parks & Community Services Mission**

*To build a healthy community through an integrated system of exceptional parks, open space, recreation, cultural and human services*

The responsibility of building a healthy community is a broad and complex mission that is shared by many institutions and individuals. Within the context of the broader community, the specific role of Parks & Community Services is provision of publicly-owned parks, recreation, cultural arts, adult misdemeanor probation and human services.

Several other Elements of the Comprehensive Plan provide policy direction for the Parks & Open Space System Plan. These include:

### **Citizen Engagement**

The City makes citizen engagement a high priority, and residents know that their local government listens and responds to them.

### **Land Use**

Growth in Bellevue is focused in denser mixed use centers, like Downtown, BelRed and Eastgate, while maintaining the city's outstanding natural environment and the health and vitality of established residential neighborhoods.

### **Neighborhoods**

Bellevue residents live in a variety of distinctive, safe and attractive neighborhoods that provide amenities and opportunities for a high quality of life.

### **Capital Facilities**

Bellevue has adequate financial resources to build and maintain the parks, streets, and other community facilities to address the community's growth and evolving needs. These facilities address multiple objectives, such as creating new open space and enhancing neighborhood character...

### **Transportation**

Safe and reliable mobility options, including walking, biking, transit and car, take people where they need to go.

### **Economic Development**

Bellevue works to attract innovative and entrepreneurial businesses through ensuring that our neighborhoods, cultural amenities, and public schools... are among the nation's best.

### **Environment**

As growth and development occurs, Bellevue is working to build a healthier, greener, and more sustainable future for generations to come... The community highly values and celebrates the results, such as reduced energy use and greenhouse gas emissions, increasing tree canopy and more salmon in local creeks.

### **Human Services**

A system of human services assists people in times of need and invests in the development of healthy individuals and families.

## Shoreline Management Program

To protect, preserve and enhance the natural resources and amenities of the city's shorelines for use and enjoyment by present and future generations.

To encourage and increase water-related recreational activities for the public on the city's shorelines when appropriate and consistent with the public interest.

## Urban Design

Rich expressions of arts and culture are found throughout the city; they are embraced by residents and "must see" attractions for visitors.

## Parks & Open Space System Plan Goals

The Parks & Open Space System Plan serves as a functional plan of the Bellevue Comprehensive Plan. It takes the broad vision, goals and policies presented in the Comprehensive Plan and outlines the function of Parks & Community Services in meeting those goals.

The functional goals of the Parks & Open Space System Plan are as follows:

- Steward and protect a coordinated system of public open spaces that preserves the city's natural character, sustains its urban forest resources, and ~~protects~~ enhances its natural systems, wildlife habitat and wildlife corridors as a legacy for future generations;
- Obtain the land necessary to provide a broad range of recreation opportunities throughout the community;
- Connect parks, neighborhoods, schools, and activity areas together through a coordinated system of trails and open spaces;
- Provide access for each and every Bellevue residents to a variety of park facilities including waterfront, play areas, sportfields, and recreation centers;
- Provide spaces and places for a variety of recreation, athletic, art, social, learning, and environmental education programs;
- Define and enhance neighborhood character by using open space as visual relief to separate and buffer between uses;
- Offer culturally competent services and programs to all ages and segments of society that provide positive alternatives for building healthy and productive lives; and
- Collaborate with other agencies, public and private, to efficiently meet the community's needs for parks, recreation, cultural opportunities, and open space.

## Department Philosophy

During the process in which the goals of this plan are translated into actionable objectives, Parks & Community Services applies the following four concepts as lenses through which potential actions are viewed and evaluated prior to decisions being made.

## Balanced Stewardship

Bellevue's parks and open space system provides important functions and values for both people and wildlife by acting as a counterbalance to urban development. As new commercial and residential development and public infrastructure is constructed across Bellevue, the City is called to advocate for and champion preservation of open space, maintaining and increasing tree canopy and restoring aquatic and terrestrial habitat for ecological benefit.

Balanced stewardship is also required within the parks and open space system itself. The park system should balance development of pParks and active recreation facilities must be balanced with preservation of cultural heritage, scarce agricultural lands and environmentally critical areas for wildlife habitat and corridors. Wildlife corridors must be maintained to provide necessary connections for animal movement among remaining habitat areas. Forest management and other environmental programs help preserve and enhance our natural resources for the benefit of wildlife and future generations of park users.

## Preserving Beauty

In the Pacific Northwest, our cultural heritage is defined by natural resources – the mountains, streams, lakes, and forests. Views of mountains, water, and undisturbed forests and wetlands are highly valued by Bellevue residents. Preservation and restoration of natural beauty are major components of the community's mandate for the park system.

Bellevue's park system should be safe and well managed in order to preserve and enhance the city's beauty and provide visual relief from the impacts of urban living. Street trees, flowers, lawns, forests and water provide a pleasant visual setting that contributes to our community's physical and mental health, well-being and quality of life. The term "City in a Park" exemplifies the Bellevue experience of urban living surrounded by large natural open space areas. This environment gives Bellevue a competitive advantage in attracting corporations to locate in the city. A high quality of life and access to outdoor recreation opportunities are key factors in contemporary business siting decisions.

## Future Focus

Bellevue's park system should serve the present users while also focusing on future needs. A well-developed vision for long-term needs will ensure recreational opportunities and open space protection for future generations. Acquiring land for preservation or future development to meet increased recreational needs is a high priority. A well-planned parks and open space system will be achieved by projecting population growth and determining expected use patterns.

## Access and Opportunity

Bellevue's park system must serve all sectors of the population equitably, providing a variety of active and passive recreation opportunities. Special consideration is given to youth, older adults, individuals with disabilities, households with low incomes and others with special needs. Bellevue's population is culturally and ethnically diverse. This creates opportunities to provide culturally specific recreation, arts and events that benefit and enrich the lives of all residents. Also, trends and preferences in recreation

change. Therefore, Parks & Community Services must proactively assess new recreational trends and provide appropriate facilities when warranted by demand.

## Achieving the Goals: Decision and Design Factors

Additional detail is helpful to see how the mission, goals and philosophies of Parks & Community Services shape how decisions are made on a day-to-day basis on issues related to expanding, developing, maintaining and promoting use of the parks and open space system.

## Acquisition and Development

Land acquisition is highly dependent on availability and affordability. Because of increasing development pressures on remaining vacant land, suitable and affordable land will be evaluated for acquisition when available. Surveys of Bellevue residents, including the latest survey completed in September 2015, consistently indicate that Bellevue citizens place equal priority on both acquiring and preserving open space and on developing new parks and recreation facilities.

Land is acquired and held in public ownership to ensure it is available for future park use when development and maintenance funding exist. When development is feasible and appropriate, a master plan for the park is prepared with community input. At the time of application for the development of the park, the project is reviewed for compliance with relevant City, State, and Federal regulations. For example, parking and traffic impacts are factors that will be evaluated as part of this development review process. Where full development of newly acquired property is not appropriate or possible in the near term, a minimal level of public access, such as trails, will be provided when possible.

Priority will be placed on acquiring land adjacent to existing parkland, along shorelines, environmentally sensitive land, or linkages that provide connections between parks and open space areas. Priority will also be given to increasing park access for neighborhoods that are less served than others.

## Environmental Stewardship and Education

Promoting healthy natural systems requires acquiring and preserving key parcels of different habitat types so that wildlife have adequate and appropriate areas to feed, live, breed, and migrate. Habitat areas must be large enough to accommodate a variety of species. In addition, to avoid isolating habitat areas, wildlife corridor connections must be acquired and preserved to allow safe and easy movement between these key parcels. Protecting these natural systems in an urbanized area requires both a robust publicly-owned open space system as well as enforcement of environmental regulations to protect environmentally critical areas that are privately owned.

Protecting and managing public natural areas is complemented by providing ~~environmental education and assistance programming~~ for all ages residents and land owners, supporting their individual stewardship ethic on privately-owned land. Ultimately, protection and stewardship of the environment rests in the hands of thousands of individual residents and property owners. Educating the public about the importance of the city's natural systems helps them understand the benefits these systems provide and leads to a shared vision

for resource protection. Where appropriate, environmental education could be enhanced with other types of support and assistance such as incentives, best practice examples and subject-matter expert guidance.

## **Regional Coordination**

Many recreational opportunities are most efficiently provided on a regional or sub-regional basis. King County, Redmond, Kirkland, Renton, Newcastle, and Issaquah are key to a successful Eastside coordination effort. Working together with neighboring jurisdictions will provide a greater variety of park and recreation services, avoid duplication, and promote geographic distribution of facilities.

## **Park Master Planning**

Before a new park is developed, a master plan for that specific site is prepared. The master plan process includes a significant public input process with review and approval by the Parks & Community Services Board and the City Council. The purpose of the plan is to provide a consistent and long-term vision for phased development of a park over time. Many parks take decades to reach their design vision. As implementation occurs over time, each park must be designed for uses that are consistent with the principles of the master plan.

## **Designing for Multiple Uses**

To the greatest extent possible, decisions to develop new parks or redevelop aging parks must consider providing for multiple uses by multiple user groups. This approach maximizes the benefits available to users of a particular park. Mercer Slough Nature Park is an excellent example of parkland serving multiple functions. It offers trails for pedestrians and bicyclists and waterways for canoes and kayaks. The wetlands and waterways of Mercer Slough provide habitat for more than 160 different species of wildlife, including heron, beaver, and salmon. A sense of Bellevue's historical and cultural heritage is preserved at the historic Winters House and through the continuing agricultural practices of farming blueberries in the park. In addition, the Pacific Science Center offers environmental education programs at the Mercer Slough Environmental Education Center. Added to this, the Slough provides immense benefits in the amount of storm water detention, water quality filtering and carbon emission capture and storage.

## **Regular Public Involvement**

Citizen participation is imperative in providing a responsive, effective, and high-quality park system. Bellevue's parks and open space system is being developed on behalf of the community. Therefore, citizen involvement throughout the planning and programming decision process ensures the community's needs and values are reflected in the city's park system.

Volunteers are another important component in public involvement. Not only do they help provide needed services efficiently and cost effectively, but they also represent a strong commitment toward community ownership of park resources. Volunteers contribute thousands of hours annually helping enhance parks, facilities, and programs.

## **Security and Safety**

Bellevue's park system should provide a sense of security, safety, and well-being for its users. Anticipating these issues and designing and programming parks accordingly can help avoid or limit unwanted activity. Signage and regulations publicize guidelines for acceptable behavior and let users know appropriate times and ways to use parklands and facilities. Park Rangers patrolling parks during high-use periods are effective in regulating unwanted activities and making park spaces safer. Regular maintenance and appropriate planting enhance visibility into parkland from public rights-of-way, which increases the overall sense of security and safety.

Proper maintenance, renovation, and replacement of parks and park equipment prevents and corrects hazardous conditions, thereby protecting the public as well as reducing liability to the City.

### Community Services and Programs

Of equal value to building a park is providing programming within the park. Parks & Community Services offers a variety of recreation and community service programs with an emphasis on serving youth, older adults, individuals with disability and low- and moderate-income individuals and families. Programs provide educational, social, and recreational opportunities that help to build healthy productive lives for all of Bellevue's citizens. These community services and programs are discussed in the Recreation Program Plan, which is a companion document to the Parks & Open Space System Plan.

### Natural Resource and Habitat Conservation

Bellevue is fortunate to have a wide variety of lakes, streams, wetlands, and forests located within its boundaries. Preserving these environmentally sensitive areas is a high priority as development pressure remains strong. Bellevue's habitat conservation plan is captured in two Elements of the Bellevue Comprehensive Plan. First, the [Environmental Element](#) provides the policy framework for protecting and improving Bellevue's natural environment. The concepts discussed in this element include:

- Water resources
- Critical Areas, including wetlands, geologic hazard areas and flood zones
- Fish and wildlife conservation areas
- Tree canopy
- Greenhouse gas emissions
- Waste and materials management
- Air and noise pollution

Second, the [Shoreline Management Element](#) includes policies that direct development to be compatible with the natural attributes of Bellevue's shorelines with a goal of maintaining and improving the ecological function and habitat value of shoreline and associated wetland areas.

To implement these goals and objectives, a series of supporting functional plans, regulatory codes and procedural manuals described below work together to improve environmental stewardship and habitat conservation. These include this Parks & Open Space System Plan, the City's Critical Areas Ordinance,

the Shoreline Master Program and the City's Environmental Best Management Practices & Design Standards Manual.

Within this plan, the Capital Project Objectives chapter captures the City of Bellevue's immediate and long-range plans for stewardship and expansion of the 2,100 acres of forest and natural areas currently in public ownership. The benefits of publicly owned and managed open space include:

- Native plant and wildlife habitat protection, including fish spawning habitat.
- Stream corridor, wetland, and forested slope preservation.
- Storm water biofiltration for improved water quality.
- Natural flood control and improved air quality.
- Outdoor classrooms for environmental education.
- Providing park and open space linkages for people and wildlife.
- Hiking, canoeing, bird watching, and other forms of recreation.
- Places of tranquility for personal reflection, inspiration, and other forms of passive recreation.

The [Critical Areas Ordinance](#) and [Shoreline Management Program](#) encourage and require natural resource protection and habitat conservation on both public and private property. To guide property owners through the code requirements, the City published a Critical Areas Handbook in 2009. The Handbook is a step-by-step guide to aid in the development, installation, monitoring, and maintenance of small-scale environmental enhancement and restoration projects. Similarly, a Shoreline Restoration Plan is currently being reviewed to assist in implementation of Shoreline Management goals and requirements.

The Environmental Best Management Practices & Design Standards Manual was written cooperatively by multiple City departments. The manual provides clear direction on standard operational procedures; effectively communicates Parks & Community Services operational practices to the public; and responds to regional, state and federal environmental requirements

