

Southwest Bellevue Subarea Plan

OVERVIEW

Southwest Bellevue's location with respect to Lake Washington and Mercer Slough played a key role in shaping its development. Close proximity to the lake and the subsequent ferry system and bridges contributed to Southwest Bellevue's early settlement.

William Meydenbauer and Aaron Mercer were among the first white settlers in the Bellevue area. In 1869, Meydenbauer staked a claim to the area around the bay that now bears his name. Mercer settled on 80.5 acres on the west bank of Mercer Slough which, at that time, extended west to the present location of Bellevue Way and 112th Avenue SE.

In the late 1800s, logging industries occupied much of Southwest Bellevue. Logging operators concentrated their timber harvesting efforts generally within a mile of the lake to facilitate the floating of logs to the nearby Wilburton sawmill. Meydenbauer Bay became the repository for logs awaiting transport to mills on the west side of Lake Washington.

Prior to the construction of bridges spanning Lake Washington, area residents relied on a steamer ferry system. The first ferry landing dock was built in 1904 at Burrows Landing, south of the present-day Chism Park. Additional boat landings were located on the south shore of Meydenbauer Bay (Calvert's Landing), in the town of Beaux Arts, and in Killarney.

Construction of the ship canal between Lake Union and Lake Washington, lowered the level of Lake Washington by 21 feet, thereby altering the configuration of Mercer Slough. No longer could steamers traverse its course as far north as the Wilburton Mill, close to the present location of Bellevue City Hall. However, the resulting exposure of land afforded area farmers expanded opportunity for agricultural enterprises. In 1920, a drainage project in Mercer Slough enhanced the area for farming. In the 1970s, demolition debris from Seattle filled portions of the north part of the Slough where the Bellefield Office Park now provides employment opportunities in a lush wetland setting.

In the 1920s and 1930s, the area experienced steady population growth. At that time, the primary industries included sawmills, canneries, boat building, truck farming, chicken ranching, orchards and berry farming. Also, in 1902, a holly farm was

established at Yarrow Point and in 1903, was expanded to include a 10-acre site in the Enatai neighborhood. At one time this industry was the largest supplier of holly in the United States. In 1933, a blueberry farm was planted in the vicinity of the Barnes and Noble Bookstore and the Goodguys in downtown Bellevue, and was moved to Mercer Slough in 1947 to become the Overlake Blueberry Farm. For a 25-year period ending in 1947, the American Pacific Whaling Company wintered its fleet of boats in Meydenbauer Bay. Residential population in the Bellevue area expanded in the 1940s and 1950s with the completion in 1938 of the Lake Washington (Mercer Island, I-90) Floating Bridge.

Today, Southwest Bellevue exhibits the characteristics of a neighborhood, or a quiet town within the City, that has evolved over time. Despite the proximity to downtown Bellevue, residents characterize much of the area as “quaint” and “rustic,” and they speak fondly of the unique qualities that set Southwest Bellevue apart. By comparison, other suburban residential areas in Bellevue have a predictable similarity about them, and would not likely evoke a vision of “rustic.” Just what makes Southwest Bellevue special?

Trees! When viewed from downtown Bellevue, Interstate 405, Interstate 90, or Lake Washington, the dominant feature of Southwest Bellevue is the trees. These trees are the Douglas Fir, Western Hemlock, and Western Red Cedar that reforested the hills following the logging activity of the late 1800s. Without any requirement to preserve trees, but rather the desire to maintain the wooded character, housing developers built thousands of new houses while retaining a significant amount of the native vegetation. Relatively undisturbed forest exists on steep slope areas. In other areas, the trees are part of the maintained landscape surrounding houses, schools, and churches. Where new housing was built on cleared sites in the 1950s and 1960s, planted trees have assumed a dominant position on the skyline. The community values the continued maintenance and planting of trees to assure the long-term health of Southwest Bellevue’s urban forest.

Instead of setting out a strict grid street pattern, King County and later, the City of Bellevue worked with Southwest Bellevue developers to establish a curvilinear, yet interconnected street system. There are very few cul-de-sacs in Southwest Bellevue. This street system was laid out with sensitivity to the local topography and other natural features of the land, as well as to discourage cut-through traffic and to provide multiple options for travel routes. Streets tend to be narrower than in other parts of the City and many do not have curbs and sidewalks. Beneficiaries of this street system are the pedestrians and bicyclists who can travel on most of the residential streets in relative safety.

Another feature closely related to the street system is the variety of residential lot sizes. Individual lots vary in size from more than an acre to less than one quarter

of an acre. The distance between streets, the local topography, the historical land use pattern, and the development regulations under King County and Bellevue contribute to wide range of lot sizes. A mix of large and small lots, a range of zoning designations, and the many years of incremental development contribute to a mix of housing types, styles, and sizes. The corresponding range of prices provides housing opportunities for a wide economic range of households. Southwest Bellevue's residential areas are generally well maintained and highly desirable. Homeowners are upgrading and expanding their homes as their needs change. Rather than moving from the neighborhood they are investing in its future. The wide range of housing choices yields a diversity of population that the community views as an asset, helping to create a vibrant neighborhood with a mix of new and long-term residents.

Within Southwest Bellevue are several important elements that build a sense of community; the schools, churches, parks, and neighborhood businesses. Southwest Bellevue is home to Enatai Elementary School and Bellevue High School. A second elementary school, Surrey Downs Elementary closed in 1981, yet still provides some community functions through the District Court, child care center, and playfields. Southwest Bellevue's churches serve the residents of the immediate area as well as the larger community. Religious and community events provide many opportunities for residents to come together. The City of Bellevue's parks system in Southwest Bellevue is diverse and unique. From the expansive Mercer Slough Nature Park, to the tiny Burrows Landing and Chesterfield Beach Parks, public open space is well dispersed and provides a wide range of outdoor recreational opportunities. Long-established neighborhood businesses along Bellevue Way provide a sense of place and continuity for residents in a fast-changing community. Chace's Pancake Corral and the Bellevue Nursery are among the businesses that have for many years contributed to the quality of life of Bellevue residents.

Bellevue Way is the primary gateway to downtown Bellevue from the south. It carries a large volume of traffic between Downtown and I-90 and is well served by transit. High quality, higher density residential development has been built along Bellevue Way, particularly north of the Fire Station #1 at SE 8th Street. Possibly as a consequence of the impacts of heavy traffic on Bellevue Way, some Single-family residences south of the fire station and on the east side of the street have not been as well maintained as in other areas of Southwest Bellevue. Redevelopment to higher density residential uses in this area that has direct access to the east side of Bellevue Way may enhance the visual appearance of the Bellevue Way corridor as well as provide additional housing opportunities. New businesses in existing commercial areas will add to the vitality and interest along the street, and provide goods and services to residents within walking distance of their homes.

While Southwest Bellevue will evolve over time as circumstances change, it will remain a highly desirable area for current and future residents. Planned growth will

help protect the characteristics of Southwest Bellevue that residents enjoy coming home to. New, higher density residential development will be restricted to the Bellevue Way corridor, and around Meydenbauer Bay. Within the Single-family residential areas, zoning regulations will preclude more intensive uses of the land and will ensure a stable, familiar land use pattern. Modernization and expansion of Single-family dwellings is likely to be ongoing as household needs change. Although some change is inevitable, and may in fact be desirable, the wooded, rustic setting that sets Southwest Bellevue apart will continue to enhance the quality of life for Southwest Bellevue residents.

Land Use

GOALS:

- **To provide for land use patterns and densities which minimize the conflict between zoning and existing land use.**
- **To protect and maintain the Single-family residential neighborhoods through the application of zoning.**
- **To maintain a variety of residential areas of different densities and housing types so that a wide range of housing opportunities will be available.**
- **To preserve the residential land uses at the entrances to residential neighborhoods such as Surrey Downs.**

POLICIES

POLICY S-SW-1. Support the existing land use patterns and densities as shown on the Land Use Plan (*Figure S-SSW.1*) with the maintenance of capital facilities and services.

POLICY S-SW-2. Protect single-family residential neighborhoods from the adverse impacts of multifamily and commercial development.

POLICY S-SW-3. Limit expansion of retail service and professional office uses to locations where permitted by this subarea plan.

POLICY S-SW-4. Support neighborhood business areas to provide convenient local shopping opportunities.

POLICY S-SW-5. Residential development up to 15 units per acre (R-15) is appropriate on the land designated Multifamily-Medium (MF-M) at 1108 and 1110 Bellevue Way S.E.

POLICY S-SW-6. Zoning designations of R-2.5 and R-3.5 are appropriate to reflect the existing development density on the land designated Single-family - Medium on the west side of 104th Avenue S.E. in the vicinity of S.E. 16th Street.

POLICY S-SW-7. Zoning designations of R-2.5 and R-3.5 are appropriate to reflect the existing development density on land designated Single-family - Medium in the vicinity of S.E. 19th Street, S.E. 20th Street, 104th Avenue S.E., and 107th Avenue S.E.

POLICY S-SW-8. Maintain the borders of the Downtown Bellevue Subarea as established by the 1979 Subarea Plan to prevent the spread of Downtown into adjacent residential neighborhoods.

POLICY S-SW-9. Retain significant trees adjacent to the Single-family area east of future multifamily development along the east side of Bellevue Way between S.E. 10th Street and S.E. 11th Street.

POLICY S-SW-10. Ensure through design review that Single-family access is separated from multifamily parking by a landscaped buffer strip.

Environmental

GOALS:

- **To retain and enhance existing vegetation on steep slopes, within wetland areas, and along stream corridors in order to control erosion, to minimize landslide/earthquake hazard potential, and to protect the natural drainage systems.**
- **To enhance water quality and floodplain functions of Meydenbauer Creek, Mercer Slough, and other streams and wetlands.**

POLICIES

POLICY S-SW-11. Target streams and wetlands in the Southwest Bellevue Subarea for enhancement through the Stream Team, Neighborhood Enhancement, and other programs.

POLICY S-SW-12. Provide for continued agricultural uses in the Mercer Slough area.

POLICY S-SW-13. Retain significant vegetation during the site plan approval and construction process.

Parks, Open Space, and Recreation

GOALS:

- To enhance access to existing and planned parks, public open spaces, public waterfront, and recreation areas.
- To encourage multiple use of schools, churches, and other community facilities.
- To maintain existing agricultural uses in the Mercer Slough.

POLICIES

POLICY S-SW-14. Design future development of community facilities and parks to be compatible in scale and density with the existing development.

POLICY S-SW-15. Encourage upkeep and maintenance of school properties by joint school district/user efforts.

POLICY S-SW-16. Consider the impacts on nearby neighborhoods when determining uses for schools.

POLICY S-SW-17. Acquire public waterfront access along Lake Washington in the Southwest Bellevue Subarea.

POLICY S-SW-18. Develop both affordable housing and a mini-park on City-owned land at 10118 S.E. 6th Street.

Transportation

GOALS:

- To maintain 112th Avenue S.E. and Bellevue Way S.E. as the principal arterials to carry commuter traffic between Downtown and I-90.
- To encourage the aesthetic development of Bellevue Way S.E. as a gateway from I-90 to Main Street (refer to Policy UD-45 in the Comprehensive Plan).
- To encourage consolidated access for properties fronting on Bellevue Way S.E. and 112th Avenue S.E. as redevelopment occurs.

POLICIES

POLICY S-SW-19. Provide for the aesthetic development of Bellevue Way S.E. and 112th Avenue S.E. including the provision of sidewalks and bicycle lanes on both sides of the street and landscaping along the entire street so as to provide the feeling of a continuous boulevard and a gateway for Bellevue.

POLICY S-SW-20. Provide informational signage at appropriate locations to direct traffic away from residential streets.

POLICY S-SW-21. Link activity areas, parks, and community facilities with trails and bikeways.

POLICY S-SW-22. Provide a pedestrian/bicycle system using public rights-of-way to link Chism and Killarney Glen Parks and Mercer Slough.

POLICY S-SW-23. Provide pedestrian and bicycle access from Bellevue Way S.E. to Mercer Slough and its trail system.

POLICY S-SW-24. Provide path and sidewalk access to Killarney Glen Park from S.E. 16th with development of the parcel northwest of the park.

POLICY S-SW-25. Provide for pedestrian and bicycle facilities along Bellevue Way S.E. and 112th Avenue S.E. to enhance nonmotorized access from residential streets to Downtown.

POLICY S-SW-26. Buffer the pedestrian and/or bicyclist from vehicular traffic on heavily traveled arterials such as Bellevue Way, 112th Avenue S.E., and Main Street.

POLICY S-SW-27. Removed by Ordinance 6251.

POLICY S-SW-28. Encourage the development of consolidated access points to minimize conflict with through traffic as properties along the east side of Bellevue Way S.E. redevelop to multifamily residential use.

POLICY S-SW-29. Obtain exclusive Bellevue Fire Department use of the S.E. 8th Street right-of-way on the east side of Bellevue Way S.E.

POLICY S-SW-30. Allow for the vacation of the unused right-of-way of 105th Avenue S.E. between S.E. 8th Street and S.E. 10th Street in conjunction with residential development on the adjacent property.

POLICY S-SW-31. Allow for the vacation of a portion of the unused right-of-

way of S.E. 10th Street east of Bellevue Way S.E. in conjunction with residential development on the adjacent property.

POLICY S-SW-32. Encourage the construction of a nonmotorized trail connection between Bellevue Way S.E. and 106th Avenue S.E. on the right-of-way of S.E. 10th Street.

Urban Design

GOALS:

- **To encourage the preservation of the existing residential and arboreal character of Southwest Bellevue.**
- **To encourage retention and enhancement of historic landmarks.**
- **To encourage design features such as landscaping, pedestrian amenities, and street furniture at intersections and in areas with excess right-of-way on Bellevue Way S.E. to establish and/or enhance residential character.**

POLICIES

POLICY S-SW-33. Discourage through traffic in residential neighborhoods and provide for vehicular and pedestrian safety at intersections.

POLICY S-SW-34. Enhance access to parks while minimizing the impact upon existing vegetation in the development and maintenance of pathways and parks.

POLICY S-SW-35. Preserve significant vegetation in designing and developing nonmotorized transportation facilities.

POLICY S-SW-36. Encourage the design of new multifamily and commercial development along Bellevue Way to be compatible with the residential setting.

POLICY S-SW-37. Limit street lighting to those areas necessary for public safety and ensure that the lighting is compatible with the scale and character of the setting.

POLICY S-SW-38. Maintain the rustic streetscape character in neighborhoods where it currently exists.

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