

## Introduction

As a foundational and holistic document, Bellevue's Comprehensive Plan is informed by the many diverse communities and interests that make up the city. As part of the planning process decision-makers must balance the needs of many different constituents. To support these needed conversations, the planning team convened the **Bellevue 2044 Strategy Team** as a way of bringing different voices together to engage in deliberative dialog on key issues.

The Bellevue 2044 Strategy Team included representatives from the business community, development sector, affordable housing providers, community-based organizations, the arts community, Bellevue School District, and neighborhood leaders in a series of monthly meetings between June 2022 and March 2023.

In these meetings Strategy Team members brought their subject matter expertise and lived experience to conversations with the aim of shared learning and exploration of complex issues.

The primary goal of the Strategy Team Meetings was to better understand where there is consensus and where there is divergence on key planning issues among stakeholders with different perspectives and motivations. Input from the Strategy Team Meeting was used to meet the following objectives:

- Inform the development of land use approaches for consideration in the environmental review process.
- Compile a set of qualitative data about the experiences, thoughts, and perspectives on key issues that can be shared with the City Council and Planning Commission to inform their decision making.
- To inform the development of a statistically valid survey that was be used to better understand community opinion on key issues.

This report fulfills the second objective and provides a set of qualitative data that captures the ideas, concerns, and questions raised by key stakeholders. This document includes a brief description of each of the Strategy Team meetings and a summary of the discussions.

## Key takeaways

The Bellevue 2044 Strategy Team provided a unique opportunity to bring a range of stakeholders together for ongoing dialog. Members of the Strategy Team represented a range of viewpoints, areas of expertise and interests. Through ongoing meetings, participants had the opportunity to consider opposing opinions and hear different perspectives in the spirit of shared learning that led to rich and nuanced conversations.

Out of discussions that covered a wide variety of topics, the following themes emerged:

- Consensus around the **need for affordable housing options to support Bellevue workers living in the city they work in**. This includes options for both lower-income and middle-income individuals and families.
- Consensus that the comprehensive planning process will **need to take sustainability into consideration**. This includes preserving tree canopy and green space, providing adequate transit to reduce the number of people driving alone, and supporting electrification through adequate power infrastructure.
- **Emphasis on equity over profitability** – but acknowledgement of the need for a balance of incentives and regulation to increase equity in housing and development.
- Emphasis on the **need to create a strong vision** for Bellevue that is bold and innovative.
- Acknowledgement that **creating that vision will require partnerships and good communication** between groups that have not always worked together, such as developers, city staff, non-profit organizations, and neighborhood leaders.
- Acknowledgement that it will take work to **bring skeptics along and include the perspectives of those whose voices have been historically marginalized**.

**Meeting 1: June 21, 2022**

Many issues addressed in the Comprehensive Plan are complex; decisions will involve making trade-offs and balancing competing needs. The Comprehensive Plan reflects the community's values and vision for growth. In order to lay a foundation for discussions that would be grounded in shared values, the Strategy Team created a list of group values that was meant to inform the work and guide their process.

**Strategy team core process values:**

- Intentionality
- Courageous innovation
- Vision
- Community
- Equity

**Strategy team core community values:**

- Well-being
- Empathy
- Inclusivity
- Equity

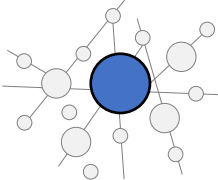
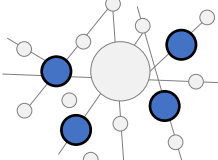
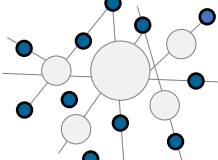
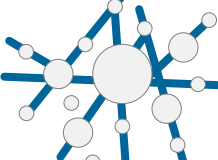
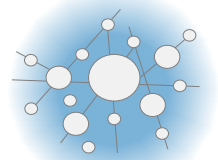
Meeting 2: July 19, 2022

After imagining the city they want in Bellevue in 2044, Strategy Team members began talking about how Bellevue could grow. The city has enough capacity to meet the jobs target but will need to add at least 35,000 additional housing units to meet the minimum housing target. In thinking about growth there are several questions that need to be considered:

- **Focus of growth:** Where we plan for growth?
- **Amount of growth:** How much growth to plan for?
- **Type of growth:** What kind of housing and amenities should neighborhoods support?

The planning team introduced the following options for how and where it could focus growth.

The city could:

	<p>1. <b>Increase density in Bellevue’s growth corridor</b> – add capacity in areas it already exists.</p>
	<p>2. <b>Increase density in Bellevue’s countywide centers</b> – add capacity in areas it already exists + mixed-use centers.</p>
	<p>3. <b>Establish a network of neighborhood centers</b> – smaller scale growth with additional capacity through a series of small mixed-use areas.</p>
	<p>4. <b>Focus density along arterials</b> – add capacity along existing arterials across the city.</p>
	<p>5. <b>Gently increase density across the city</b> – spread capacity across the city.</p>

In small groups, Strategy Team members provided initial thoughts and reactions for the different growth concepts. Strategy Team members were asked to consider how each growth concept might impact housing choice, affordability, and equity. They were asked to articulate their concerns and what excited them about each concept. Below are some of the key themes from those discussions:

<b>Growth concept</b>	<b>Impacts to housing choice and affordability</b>	<b>Impacts to equity</b>	<b>Other considerations</b>
<b>Increase housing density in Bellevue's growth corridor (DT, Wilburton/ East Main, and BelRed)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Would not improve affordability</li> <li>▪ Would funnel more resources to the DT core at the expense of other areas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Deepen inequity</li> <li>▪ Deepen housing segregation and exclusionary zoning</li> <li>▪ Increase housing in proximity to transit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Increase traffic and congestion</li> <li>▪ Could preserve green space for homeowners but reduce access to greenspace for renters who are more likely to be in the growth corridor</li> <li>▪ Will not meet the needs for a variety of affordable housing options in Bellevue</li> </ul>
<b>Increase density in Bellevue's countywide centers (DT Wilburton/East Main, BelRed, Crossroads, Factoria, Eastgate)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Likely to increase housing choice and diversity of housing options</li> <li>▪ More choice doesn't guarantee affordability</li> <li>▪ Housing likely to be built may not be attractive to families</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Concentrates jobs, services and housing in these nodes – that could be good for those who live there</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Spreads growth throughout the City</li> <li>▪ Need connectivity between centers</li> <li>▪ Changes 'small town' feel</li> <li>▪ Would need to include affordability targets</li> <li>▪ Would help create neighborhoods with strong identities</li> <li>▪ Infrastructure is already in these centers</li> </ul>

Growth concept	Impacts to housing choice and affordability	Impacts to equity	Other considerations
<p><b>Establish a network of neighborhood centers with smaller-scale growth</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The additional ADUs and cottages could open up home ownership to more people</li> <li>▪ Single family homes likely to be replaced by townhomes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Could lead to more inclusive, mixed-income neighborhoods</li> <li>▪ Need to spread growth equitably to avoid displacing existing communities</li> <li>▪ Could allow more people who work in Bellevue to live in Bellevue</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Land value would increase</li> <li>▪ Would not adequately meet housing need on its own</li> <li>▪ Would require better public transit</li> <li>▪ Totem Lake Village is a good example</li> <li>▪ Would help create neighborhoods with strong identities</li> </ul>
<p><b>Focus density along arterials</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Limits diversity of housing</li> <li>▪ Might increase affordability</li> <li>▪ Less likely for family-sized units to be included</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Could lead to a transitory population disconnected from meaningful community development and social connection</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ May increase congestion on arterials</li> <li>▪ More people might take transit</li> </ul>
<p><b>Gently increase density across the city</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Would lead to more choice in types of housing</li> <li>▪ Likely to lead to increased housing capacity and lower costs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Could create options for working class people like teachers, police, nurses, etc. who cannot currently afford to live in Bellevue</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Would lead to more sprawl/ parking/ traffic issues</li> </ul>

The groups were not asked to discuss how combining the growth models could impact the city’s housing choices and characteristics and several members later indicated that they would have preferred exploring combined strategies.

City staff ultimately used these broad concepts to develop several growth alternatives to be analyzed in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). They were part of the scope for the DEIS and the public could comment on them. The environmental review process will continue through summer 2023. The Planning Commission will recommend a preferred alternative to be studied in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS). The growth strategy will be informed by the environmental impacts identified in the FEIS.

### Meeting 3: August 16, 2022

Bellevue is home to a variety of unique places and spaces that foster different types of activities and uses. The Periodic Update to the Comprehensive Plan provides an opportunity to improve smaller and larger centers of commercial and mixed use development. In this meeting, Strategy Team members identified their different areas of expertise and stepped into their roles as subject matter experts to explore concepts related to placemaking.

During this meeting participants were asked to discuss potential opportunities and challenges for enhancing some the of the city’s larger mixed use centers:

- BelRed
- Crossroads
- Downtown
- Wilburton
- Eastgate

They used housing, equity, and sustainability as lenses to identify opportunities and challenges for each area based on their different lenses/areas of expertise. The groups identified the following opportunities and challenges:

Area	Opportunities	Challenges
<b>BelRed</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Sound Transit Light Rail expansion and increased transit connectivity will increase accessibility in this region</li> <li>▪ BelRed could support a diversity of affordable housing types</li> <li>▪ Range of demographics and income levels</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ I-405 is a barrier</li> <li>▪ Differing views on new development of a park and ride structure</li> </ul>

Area	Opportunities	Challenges
<b>Crossroads</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Increase the diversity of services to meet the needs of people moving into the community</li> <li>▪ Ground floor retail plus residential structure makes Crossroads a very lively place!</li> <li>▪ Could be a very diverse, interesting place with lots of small, ethnically and culturally specific restaurants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ New development in the area is nice, but mostly serves Microsoft employees</li> <li>▪ No distinct identity – lots of chain stores</li> <li>▪ Not enough reason for people to stay in the neighborhood</li> <li>▪ Need better transportation options</li> </ul>
<b>Downtown</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Expand use for different types of services in new development beyond retail or restaurants</li> <li>▪ Increase walkability and transit options that move people Downtown</li> <li>▪ Add greenspace on I-405 lid</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Area doesn't integrate with surrounding neighborhoods.</li> <li>▪ Lacking diverse and affordable housing options</li> <li>▪ Parking and traffic are issues</li> <li>▪ Needs more crosswalks on long blocks</li> <li>▪ Conflicting needs of daytime users and residents</li> </ul>
<b>Eastgate</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Hard to define – lot of different things happening, split by 90 and 148<sup>th</sup></li> <li>▪ Bellevue College needs to be taken into account – how do we house students?</li> <li>▪ Michael's Toyota is expanding and doesn't give back to the community at all – seems out of place</li> <li>▪ Robinswood park is awesome but lacks parking – impacts neighborhoods</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Houses are flipping – bigger houses being built and long</li> <li>▪ Traffic is a major issue – not local traffic but cut-through to get onto highway</li> <li>▪ Impacts residents of area but not their traffic</li> <li>▪ How much more development can happen – what's gonna happen on the south side in the future?</li> </ul>
<b>Wilburton</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <u>Potential</u>, access to Downtown and jobs, frequent transit is great with 4 LRT stations near and BRT going through, opportunity for mixed use near DT and transit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <u>Poor walkability</u>, long block lengths, lack of activity, vehicular traffic, hard to get to transit, underzoned especially for multifamily and mixed</li> </ul>

Area	Opportunities	Challenges
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Eastrail = trail oriented development opportunity</li> <li>▪ Mixed income housing – evergreen court and Glendale site is great opportunity</li> <li>▪ Mixed income for teachers is needed here</li> <li>▪ Impact of LRT with 3 stations (included Spring District station)</li> <li>▪ More affordable housing because mixed use area</li> <li>▪ Freeway wall or lid to make more accessible and connect to East Main</li> <li>▪ Works well – connect to Botanical Garden</li> <li>▪ Frequent transit connection to garden would be great</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ multifamily/retail, big box development, need for thoughtful adaptation to retain uses over time</li> <li>▪ Almost no multifamily or mixed-use zoning today</li> <li>▪ More investment in parks, libraries, public space</li> <li>▪ Not many services – need key retail cores and vibrant uses</li> <li>▪ Alignment from various property owners is difficult</li> <li>▪ Not much accessibility in commercial area and around LRT stations – not walkable</li> </ul>

At the end of the exercise, some Strategy Team members expressed a concern that the neighborhoods explored in the thought exercise reinforced the idea that only areas that are already zoned for density would be impacted by growth.

Strategy Team members also explored the data that were shown at the Community Deep Dives related to [Environment](#) and [Placemaking](#) and heard about what community members shared including:

**Environment**

- More housing improves affordability and emissions efficiency but may impact natural environment.
- More family-sized units, more sustainable growth patterns, and more options for everyone are needed.
- That there are equity concerns around continuing to put density in urban core and along arterials.



**Placemaking**

- Interest in more activity and entertainment as well as small scale businesses in residential areas.
- Desire for better walking and transit.
- Appreciation for local shops and excitement about adding them close to homes.

Strategy Team members then answered questions about what impacts equity, environmental sustainability, and housing affordability in Bellevue. The table below groups the most common responses:

What impacts equity in Bellevue?	What impacts environmental sustainability?	What impacts housing affordability?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Limited transportation options</li> <li>▪ Cost of transportation and transit</li> <li>▪ Access to affordable housing</li> <li>▪ Distance from community amenities and services</li> <li>▪ Gaps in active transportation network</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Single family housing zoning</li> <li>▪ Distance between where people live and where they need to go</li> <li>▪ Availability/cost of public transportation</li> <li>▪ Balancing tree canopy and development</li> <li>▪ Incentives for clean energy, electrification, etc.</li> <li>▪ Parks and green spaces</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Single family housing zoning prioritized over mixed-use zoning and multi-family zoning</li> <li>▪ Availability of investments and funding to support housing affordability</li> <li>▪ Incentives for developers to encourage housing for low and middle-income residents</li> <li>▪ High property taxes</li> <li>▪ High cost of land</li> </ul>

**Meeting 4: September 20, 2022**

In meeting 4, Strategy Team members went deeper into the topic of planning for housing in the Comprehensive Plan. The goal of the meeting was to understand Strategy Team members’ perspectives and personal experiences related to housing in Bellevue. The project team reviewed the three key issues related to housing: capacity, typology, and affordability. The large group then broke into smaller groups based on the different lenses people bring to the housing discussion:

- Community-based organizations (CBOs)
- Developers
- Neighborhood representatives
- Tourism, Business, and Workforce

## **Capacity**

Many Strategy Team members initially expressed a preference for building between 35,000 and 55,000 additional housing units. A significant minority immediately preferred the more ambitious goal of building 70,000 additional housing units, and that number grew as the conversation about capacity went on. Several participants clarified that their selection of a less ambitious goal for the number of additional housing units reflected a lack of trust that the city could actually facilitate the building of 70,000 additional units, rather than a lack of desire to see them built.

## **Typology**

Both employers and representatives from community-based organizations stressed the need for affordable housing close to jobs and community services, and the vital importance of integrating transportation planning and housing planning. Transportation planning is important to both support sustainability goals and reduce congestion. Members of several groups agreed that there should be a variety of different kinds of affordable housing to meet different needs, and that affordable housing should be integrated into Bellevue neighborhoods, rather than concentrated in one area.

## **Affordability**

Both non-profit and for-profit developers agreed that high rise development is very expensive and not necessarily the right way to add affordable housing in Bellevue. The cost of land was also discussed as a barrier to building more affordable housing. Developers need to recoup their costs and therefore would prefer to build something they can sell at a higher price. Incentives for developers, and direct investment, such as subsidized housing, are necessary to create more affordable housing.

Some Strategy Team members stressed that creating more affordable housing in Bellevue would require addressing the fears of single-family homeowners, as well as including input from renters and people with diverse experiences.

### Meeting 5: November 1, 2022

In the final meeting of 2022, the Strategy Team acknowledged that the Periodic Update to the Comprehensive Plan will require balancing important priorities that may be in conflict with each other. Some of those priorities that may be in conflict include:

Priority	Vs.	Priority
Vibrant neighborhood centers that house services and amenities that meet local needs but require population density to thrive		Preference for “traditional” single family neighborhoods with large lots and a more rural or suburban feel
Living up to Bellevue’s idea of being a “City in a Park” that provides a lot of open space and tree canopy		Providing increased housing density and types
Making Bellevue more friendly to active transportation by providing sidewalks, parks, bike lanes, public transportation, and street-level retail		Being able to easily drive to and park at destinations
Sustainable development		Affordable development
Profitable development (for developers)		Affordable development
Maintaining neighborhood characteristics		Meeting the needs of a growing population

Strategy Team members again met in small groups based on their expertise to discuss these and other tensions between priorities. The groups were divided into representatives from:

- Community-based organizations (CBOs)
- Developers
- Neighborhood representatives
- Tourism, Business, and Workforce

There was also a group that met virtually made up of people from all of these groups.

#### Community based organizations

The group of CBO representatives agreed that the planning process in general privileges those who already have political and financial power and who have more time and resources to make themselves heard. The tension they explored was the need for developers to profit from building new housing versus the need to create more affordable housing. To address that tension, they recommended the city work to:

- Understand from builders/ developers what they need to develop more affordable and mixed-income housing and create those incentives.
- Prioritize permitting for non-profit developers.
- Require a significant percentage of affordable/mixed-income housing in new developments.
- Make it easier for people to access housing supports.

## Developers

The developers in the room chose to explore the tension between preserving tree canopy and open space versus providing new development. They disagreed that development necessarily leads to decreased tree canopy. They noted that there is a correlation between neighborhoods with more diversity and fewer trees and open space and recognized that it is an equity issue resulting from historic marginalization of low-income people and people of color. They also talked about the difference in addressing tree canopy issues through planting new trees and preserving mature trees, as well as the conflict that sometimes exists between infrastructure and maintenance needs and retaining trees. The group agreed that to balance the priorities between keeping the “City in a Park” feeling and increasing housing, the city could:

- Create more flexible zoning to allow more than one unit on properties in areas currently zoned for single-family units.
- Incentivize tree preservation.
- Encourage housing types with more units in single-family neighborhoods.
- Consider if tree type may be a more important focus rather than tree size in considering which trees to preserve or add.
- Partner with developers to better understand their needs/ constraints/ barriers so that they can work together to address these tensions.

Some members of this group cautioned against the use of a program like Seattle’s Mandatory Housing Affordability program as a way to achieve increased affordability.

Following the meeting, some Strategy Team members recommended that the City facilitate discussions between developers, residents, community-based organizations, and sustainability advocates to think together about how to support both an increase in affordable housing and maintaining a strong tree canopy.

## Neighborhood Leaders

Neighborhood leaders discussed the tensions between transit and cars in the right of way, and the desire of some Bellevue community members to keep the current suburban feel versus the need to create more housing.

In their transportation conversation they noted that the infrastructure for creating a more multi-modal friendly community (wider sidewalks and multi-modal paths that connect to a larger active transportation network, and robust transit) does not currently exist, so people choose to use their cars. This leads to more congestion, a feeling that their current issues are not being addressed, and less trust in the eventual development of a robust multi-modal network. Their suggestions for balancing these needs include:

- Encourage public/private partnerships to create more shuttle or vanpool options for people.
- Commit to new services for the long term to build trust that they will endure.
- Make ridership free for some groups such as youth or seniors.
- Make it easier and safer for seniors to use transit.
- Add more frequent transit.
- Look at possible solutions through the lens of how they will impact vulnerable people.
- Create more and more connected walking and rolling paths and sidewalks.

In their conversation about preserving the suburban look and feel of Bellevue versus adding housing and housing types, the neighborhood leaders surmised that people were acting out of fear of change and their property values decreasing, rather than thinking about creating a good place for their children and grandchildren. They recommend the city address this fear by:

- Pointing to successful demonstration projects such as the Spring District to help them see what could be.
- Offering incentives to neighborhoods to accept change.
- Starting business and public/private partnerships to create more of a community spirit and encourage people to buy into the community over the long term.

## **Tourism, Business, Workforce**

Representatives in this group discussed the tension between the preference for the status quo versus the need to create more, and more affordable, housing. They agreed that current zoning, as well as community covenants in some neighborhoods, make it difficult to increase density, and that increased density is important for Bellevue to continue to grow

and thrive. One example of how the desire to maintain the status quo constrains the community that was cited is the reduced enrollment in Bellevue Public Schools as increased prices push families who would otherwise send their children to public school outside of the school district. These business and workforce leaders recommended the city:

- Create neighborhood design standards that mitigate concerns over changing character.
- Create zoning that encourages more missing middle housing.
  - Define and provide examples of what middle housing can look like.
  - Use examples of duplexes and triplexes that integrate well into single family neighborhoods such as in Issaquah.
  - Encourage small lot housing that put more single-family houses on the same space such as in Kirkland.
- Build pocket parks to provide high density neighborhoods with outdoor open space.
- Have a bold vision that addresses fears, highlights benefits that people want (such as opportunity to age in place, proximity of small, hyper local retail) and brings people along.

## **Virtual Mixed Group**

The virtual group looked at the desire to create vibrant, walkable neighborhood centers versus the current preference in Bellevue for less dense neighborhoods. They disagreed that open space is in conflict with density, or that affordable housing is in conflict with sustainable development and acknowledged that Bellevue was designed to accommodate travel by personal vehicle. This means that adding density will require “retrofitting” an infrastructure that was built to accommodate a lack of density. Their ideas for balance include:

- Providing clear regulations and incentives for builders.
- Supporting the development of interesting and unique neighborhood centers.
  - Focusing on human scale elements such as walkability, and access to neighborhood amenities.
- Understanding better the concerns of people who are resisting change to address those concerns and develop a more positive framing.
- Addressing community fears that increasing density and development in Bellevue could lead to higher prices.

Following the meeting, one Strategy Team member noted that inclusionary zoning rules can sometimes shift the burden of providing affordable housing to market rate renters in a building, widening the rent affordability gap. This person cautioned against unintended consequences and recommended prioritizing programs that incentivize the development of affordable housing.

## Meeting 6: January 24, 2023

The Strategy Team reconvened in late January 2023 to review the draft community engagement summary, understand where the Strategy Team had found agreement and where there were tensions, and to go over next steps in the comprehensive planning process.

### Learnings

Strategy Team members celebrated the fact that so many people from different backgrounds care about affordable housing and were able to see where they shared values, despite their different perspectives. Several people expressed hope in the outcome of the process, as well as frustration that it has taken so long to prioritize things like affordable housing, equity, and sustainability in a meaningful way.

### Feedback on Strategy Team Meetings Summary To-Date

Strategy Team members had an opportunity to comment on the summary of meetings 1-5. Several members said that the summary captured their experience well. There were some outcomes of discussions that Team members identified as missing from the summary. These outcomes include:

- Pairing mandatory affordability requirements with incentives.
- Ensuring that discussions of placemaking consider green spaces and parks, which are essential to placemaking.
- Understanding what builders and developers need to build affordable housing.
- Providing a vision for builders and developers to meet.
- Adding inclusionary zoning affordability measures.
- Clearly linking affordable housing for families and a vibrant and well-funded school system.

## Where Strategy Team Members Agreed

Facilitators asked Strategy Team members to highlight where they agreed. Areas of agreement include:

- Affordability, equity, and sustainability are all admirable goals that everyone on the Strategy Team can agree on, as long as they are vaguely defined. The Comprehensive Plan should include clear definitions, and they should be built into the goals and the targets.
- It is easy for Strategy Team members to agree on what is important, but it is harder to agree on what to do about it.
- Housing capacity and affordable housing are key, but to create good, vibrant communities, we also need to consider many other things – schools, public transportation, grocery stores, parks and other green spaces, services, and jobs. Those things need to be available to everyone who lives in Bellevue. These are the things that make Bellevue a great place to live.

## Where Strategy Team members Saw Tradeoffs to be Considered

Facilitators asked Strategy Team members to identify tradeoffs. Identified trade-offs include:

- Achieving the goals of affordability, equity and sustainability is possible, but it will require innovation, compromise, and a long-term vision that includes guidelines and flexibility.
- Builders do not want to take risks so the City will need to give them some assurances, provide some infrastructure, and some connectivity.
- Single family neighborhoods are likely to change. How can we make that change easier?
- We need to consider how to densify and build more housing without displacing people who are vulnerable, like seniors, low-income people, immigrants and refugees, and People of Color.



## Who Is Missing From the Conversation?

Facilitators asked Strategy Team members to identify who has been missing from the conversation. Strategy Team members came up with the following list:

- People who are not fluent in English
- Low-income people
- Young people
- People who work in Bellevue but cannot afford to live in Bellevue
- Small-business owners
- People experiencing homelessness
- People of Color and those who are Black or Indigenous
- Immigrants
- Refugees
- People who are disabled
- People who are elderly

## Preparing for a More In-Depth Conversation on Housing

Bellevue City Planning staff informed the Strategy Team about how their work influenced the Draft EIS scope, and contributed to how Bellevue staff were framing three housing forums in late March.

Following the meeting, one Strategy Team member sent a note asking that the Comprehensive Plan consider Bellevue's future energy infrastructure to move towards cleaner energy and increased system reliability.

## Meeting 7: February 28, 2023

After the feedback from Meeting 6 about the importance of definitions for equity and inclusion, affordability, and sustainability, the Strategy Team met at the end of February to review how the City is defining those terms, learn how they relate to the Comprehensive Plan, and talk about the tools that the City has to achieve equity and inclusion, affordability, and sustainability.

## Equity conversation

Strategy Team members talked about the importance of acknowledging the disparate impacts of historical racism in Bellevue and how that has affected the housing and economic opportunities Black, Indigenous, and People of Color as well as those living on lower incomes, have had in Bellevue. There was a consensus that home ownership is a powerful tool for building wealth, and so should be made widely available to historically marginalized communities. Strategy Team members asked about how the City is going to equip itself to support residents as Bellevue navigates dismantling systemic racism and how it has shown up in policies and regulations. Strategy Team members were curious about answers to questions like:

- Who works in Bellevue but does not live in Bellevue? What are their cost constraints?
- Who has been displaced due to rising rents or housing costs?
- What barriers are people facing in keeping or attaining housing?
- What tools are currently in use for increasing equity in urban planning in Bellevue?
- What equity expertise exists among Bellevue decision-makers and their staff?
- How do current outreach programs connect with communities that are not often involved in the planning process?
- How is Bellevue supporting low-income and People of Color in accessing and keeping housing?
- How has the availability of rental housing changed over time in Bellevue.

The Strategy Team agreed that things that would contribute to equity in housing would include:

- Ample supply of different kinds of housing at all levels of affordability
- Programs that make it easier to apply for and get housing.
- Subsidies for people to access housing.

Strategy Team takeaways from the equity conversation include:

- Community input is important but should be structured to avoid NIMBY-ism.
- Outcomes that improve the lives of vulnerable people in Bellevue are more important than performative half-measures, but they will require tough decisions that will make some special interests unhappy.

- Equity is an important part of the Comprehensive Plan and we want to get it right. This is an opportunity to improve community cohesion and create social ties between all levels of income levels.

## **Affordability Conversation**

City staff noted that the definition of “affordable housing” used by the city of Bellevue is housing that costs less than 30 percent of household income each month, and that nearly all people who are low-income are paying more than 30 percent for housing. Staff also acknowledged that it is very difficult to provide housing that is affordable to people making less than 30 percent of the Area Median Income (AMI) without subsidies. In Bellevue, this includes many people who are employed in essential services.

Strategy Team members noted that some barriers to affordable housing for people making 30 percent or less than the Area Median Income include housing supply, which may in part be a result of economic incentives to build larger houses rather than multi-family housing. Other barriers noted included the cost of building housing, including permitting. Some Strategy Team members advocated for a very intentional increase in the percentage of affordable housing in the city.

Strategy Team members recommended the city consider:

- How zoning changes would impact downstream decisions.
- What policies and procedures already exist, either in Bellevue or other cities, that could help Bellevue achieve its affordable housing goals.
- How housing availability goals for various income groups is outlined in the Comprehensive Plan and how progress on those goals is measured.
- How to assess the dollar amount it would cost to meet the housing need at different income levels.
- How to address sentiments of “I like the overall goal, but I do not want my life and everyday experiences to change to achieve that.”
- The estimates are of potential outcomes of different policies to assess how they align with affordability goals.
- How to address exclusionary practices that may remain even if affordability is taken care of.

When asked what information would be useful to answer the question: “What would it look like for people in Bellevue to not be constrained by cost in accessing housing?” Strategy Team members asked:

- What income does it take to afford housing in Bellevue currently?
- What is the income distribution by identity?
- What resources does the city have or have planned to support low-income people to attain and keep affordable housing in Bellevue?
- What gaps in funding exist to achieve Bellevue's affordable housing goals?
- How many Bellevue jobs pay a living wage, and which Bellevue jobs do not?
- What are the city's housing production goals by income level?

## **Sustainability Conversation**

In the sustainability conversation, Strategy Team members recommended:

- Considering how Bellevue's infrastructure could support moving away from fossil fuels toward electrification.
- Encouraging density and preserving urban growth boundaries while discouraging sprawl.
- Prioritize public transportation.
- Balancing the need for increased housing and protecting the environment
- Incentivizing the development of sustainable buildings, using sustainable practices, and retrofitting existing buildings.
- Identifying and closing loopholes in existing regulations that allow people to, for example, cut down large trees.

## **Meeting 8: March 28, 2023**

Strategy Team members came together one last time at the end of March to incorporate learning from the February meeting into the housing approach, and to review and discuss the housing approaches that the City of Bellevue is considering.

Strategy Team members shared that, based on the meeting in February, it is clear that affordability is important, but the specific pathway to get to more affordable housing for all income levels in Bellevue remains unclear. They expressed a desire for a clear link from state direction to planning actions.

Staff shared that the Growth Management Act requires local comprehensive plans, like Bellevue's, to plan for housing for all income levels, to include multi-family and mixed use housing, including duplexes and triplexes, and must address systemic racism. In addition, in the Puget Sound area, local plans must be consistent with the Puget Sound Regional

Council's Vision 2050 Plan. Policies in that plan require cities to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, anticipate and address impacts of climate change, increase density, identify and mitigate displacement, reduce disparities, and prioritize access for historically underserved communities. King County planning policies also require that local comprehensive plans consider the impacts of climate change, provide a full range of accessible housing, and eliminate housing disparities.

Staff reviewed possible approaches for meeting Bellevue's goal to increase housing capacity and explained that each approach would include an incentive system, in addition to current housing funding programs, to encourage more affordable housing construction.

## **Alternative 1**

Alternative 1 provides some mix of subsidized and market rate housing, some variety in housing types, some support for pedestrian and transit options. This alternative maximizes investments in transit for urban centers because it creates very dense urban centers, concentrating new housing close to where the jobs are. Alternative 1 favors housing in Downtown and BelRed, but adds Wilberton to the Downtown core and adds some mixed-use and residential housing.

## **Alternative 2**

Alternative 2 provides more housing near current and anticipated frequent transit networks. This would expand housing capacity around transit. Neighborhood centers are currently almost entirely commercial, so in this alternative the neighborhood centers would be mixed-use to allow more housing within commercial area, which would increase transit capacity. Alternative 2 would increase a mix of subsidized housing, allow more opportunities for pedestrian and transit access, add more variety in housing type, and provide good support for transit nodes to create more bus service. This alternative focuses on transit hubs and enhanced neighborhood centers.

While Alternative 2 does not dictate where additional transit would be added, it does create more destination and origin points and, in that way, incentivizes transit partners to meet those needs. Alternative 2 adds more mixed-use housing in other city areas than Alternative 1.

Strategy Team members said they liked the walkability of Alternative 2, but there was some concern that it would encourage concentrating affordable housing near transit corridors instead of spreading affordable housing throughout the city. There were also questions about whether transit agencies would actually respond to an increased need for public transportation, either through rail or bus. Staff responded that Bus Rapid Transit is being added currently and the Bellevue Light Rail line should be in place in the next couple of

years. This means that the big transit investments would be there by the time this housing is constructed.

## **Alternative 3**

Alternative 3 adds areas in *and* near neighborhood centers, which are currently commercial, to help support businesses with a larger density of customers living both in and close to centers. Alternative 3 allows any lot to be developed at 4 units per acre, so Cougar Mountain and Bridle Trails would have more housing options. It has the most variety in housing type, most support for pedestrians and transit, and has the greatest mix of subsidized housing. Housing around neighborhood centers would be primarily middle housing, and housing would be closer to jobs and transit.

Strategy Team members wanted to understand how the city would maintain its sustainability goals, especially the goal to preserve tree canopy, under Alternative 3. Staff responded that the city would review to see if the existing laws would be sufficient to help maintain tree canopy, or if new regulations would be needed.

Some Strategy Team members were concerned that increasing housing in neighborhood centers would mean more traffic congestion, but others felt that Alternative 3 would make it easier for seniors and families to access goods and services and that it should be implemented right away but cautioned that the city would need to plan for additional parks, schools, emergency services, etc. to support the higher density.

## **Next steps**

Throughout this process, the Bellevue Comprehensive Planning team has used the feedback, observations, and insights from the Strategy Team to better understand the concerns and the perspectives of Bellevue stakeholders. Their contributions have informed the development of alternatives that were analyzed in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement.

Strategy Team members, like the public, will have the opportunity to review draft policies and comment on the draft Comprehensive Plan before it is finalized. The city will consider future opportunities to convene the Strategy Team for more formal discussion of draft policies.

## Strategy Team Meeting Summary

### Appendix A: List of Strategy Team Members

Name	Organization	Name	Organization
Abigail Brown	Neighborhood Leader - Northeast	Jeff Tian	CHIME (Chinese Employees of Microsoft)
Alesha Shemwell	Kemper Development	Jessica Smiddy	Bellevue PTSA
Andrea Zavos Turner	Neighborhood Leader - West Bellevue	Jessie Clawson	Bellevue Chamber
Anita Jeerage	Unico Properties	Judy Fast	Neighborhood Leader - Eastgate
Anna Preyapongspisan	YWCA	Justin McConachie	Puget Sound Energy
Ava Carrel	Bellevue High School Student	Ken Carpenter	Jubilee Reach
Brad Jones	Visit Bellevue	Lalita Uppala	Indian American Community Services
Brady Nordstrom	Futurewise	Lisa Lu	Neighborhood Leader - Architect
Brandon Morgan	Vulcan	Matt Jack	Bellevue Downtown Association
Carlos Besana	UW Planning Student, Bellevue resident	Melissa DeVita	Bellevue School District
Casey Morgan	Overlake Hospital	Michael Orbino	Seattle King County Realtors
Chad Vaculin	Housing Development Consortium	Michael Whittington	Bellevue Arts Museum
Claire Sumadiwirya	Bellden Cafe	Faye Chien	Kin On
Cliff Cawthorn	Habitat for Humanity	Patrick Schlight	Neighborhood Leader - Downtown
Court Olson	People for Climate Action	Pearl Leung	Amazon
Jimmy Anderson	Congregations for the Homeless	Sarterus (Sart) Rowe	Eastside Legal Assistance Program
Debbie Lacey	Eastside for All	Scott Lampe	Transportation advocate
Dietra Clayton	Sophia's Way	Shomari Jones	Bellevue School District - Chief Equity Officer
Don Marsh	Sierra Club	Sonja O'Claire	Master Builders Built Green program
		Soo Hong	Neighborhood Leader - Arts
Grant Keeney	Neighborhood Leader - Parks	Troy Schmeil	Master Builders - Member
Hassan Dhananjaya	Neighborhood Leader - EBCC	Wendy Weiker	Republic
Heather Clark	Eastside Easy Rider Coalition	Zoe Wang	Su Development

# Strategy Team Meeting Summary