



Parks, Recreation and Open Space

VISION

Bellevue is a “City in a Park.”

Bellevue builds a healthy community through an integrated and accessible system of exceptional parks, natural areas and recreation opportunities. In Bellevue everyone can connect to each other and to nature through experiences that help them to live, grow and thrive.

PARKS, RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE SCOPE

The Parks, Recreation and Open Space element is about how the city plans for, acquires and maintains parks, trails and open spaces and how it develops recreational activities and programs.

INTRODUCTION

Bellevue’s natural environment has long been central to its quality of life. The city lies between Lake Washington and Lake Sammamish, touching the foothills of the Cascade Mountains. Within the city are hundreds of acres of urban forests, wetlands and streams that support wildlife. Recognizing this unique natural setting, Bellevue is a “City in a Park.” Within a fast-growing city, our parks and open spaces serve as a reminder of the natural world.

Bellevue’s parks, recreation and open space system includes land and water access, greenways and trails, recreation amenities, programs and services that are treasured community assets. The system provides opportunities for the community to gather, play, learn and connect with nature, while protecting the city’s natural resources and cultural landscapes. It is expected that everyone in Bellevue can enjoy outstanding parks and recreation facilities through delivery of programs and spaces that are high-quality, accessible, safe and culturally responsive.

To provide a well-maintained and responsive parks, recreation and open space system, the city embraces partnerships and seeks opportunities to collaborate with all sectors of the community. These collaborations promote effective use of public funds, enhance programming and service delivery and invite the community to share in the mission.

PARKS AND OPEN SPACE SYSTEM PLAN

The Parks and Open Space System Plan guides the long-range vision for acquisition and development of parks and trails and preservation of open space. It also sets the standards whereby the system is operated and maintained. The plan is a foundational tool in developing the Parks & Community Services Department’s Capital Investment Program.





TODAY'S CONDITIONS AND TOMORROW'S PROJECTIONS

Parks, Recreation and Open Space Today and Tomorrow

Parks, recreation and open space facilities are used regularly by people that live, work and visit Bellevue. System-wide, it is estimated that over one million visits are made to parks facilities each year. In general, park users report a high level of satisfaction with parks and recreation opportunities and see the parks, recreation and open space system as a key element of a high quality of life.

As of 2024, Bellevue Parks & Community Services manages over 2,700 acres of parks and open space. The system features a variety of park lands, from small neighborhood parks to large, multi-use community parks to natural areas managed for resource conservation. About 98 miles of trails managed by Parks & Community Services weave through Bellevue's parks and greenway corridors. Historic structures and art installations are also found throughout the system.

Large multi-use community centers and other recreation facilities serve different geographic areas of the city and offer services targeting specific population groups. Athletic fields and courts support organized outdoor sports such as soccer, football, lacrosse, basketball, cricket, baseball, golf and tennis. Other recreation facilities found in parks include playgrounds, picnic shelters, off-leash dog areas, an aquatic center and community garden plots. There are opportunities for visual and performing arts, special community events, after-school and summer day camps, youth leadership development and life-long learning skills.

Bellevue recreation programs continue to be popular with tens of thousands of participants through community centers, programs for older adults, the Bellevue Youth Theatre, youth sports, skate parks, day camps and other events and opportunities. Annually, several thousand volunteers from the Bellevue community support the programs and services offered by Parks & Community Services.

Bellevue is an attractive place for commercial and residential development in part because of the extensive and well-maintained system of parks and open space. Growth of the population is associated with increased demand for system facilities and will require additional facilities be added to the system to maintain an adequate level of service for the community. Commensurate resources and funding will also be needed to maintain parks to their typically high standard. Several aspects of growth, along with demographic trends, will impact the future of the parks, recreation and open space system in Bellevue.

Bellevue has become and will continue to develop as a diverse city. The increasing diversity of park users will affect the type of services and recreation offered in the future. For instance, older adults will need recreation facilities and programs that cater to their specific needs. Growing ethnic and cultural diversity creates opportunities to provide a wider variety of sports, arts and cultural events to all Bellevue residents.

New parks and trails will be needed to serve areas of growth across the city, in addition to currently underserved areas. Maintaining and increasing access to parks and trails is a priority. Neighborhoods like Downtown, BelRed and the western side of Wilburton are expected to see extensive growth. These neighborhoods need to have access to parks and quality outdoor space for many people in a relatively constrained area. Apartment, condo and townhome buildings will make up most of the housing growth in Bellevue and multi-family housing does not always have dedicated private parks facilities for residents. Careful parks planning and acquisition strategies will be necessary to ensure that all areas of the city have equitable access to safe, diverse and quality recreation opportunities.

RECREATION PROGRAM PLAN

The Recreation Program Plan defines the City's role as a recreational provider in the system, states a vision for recreation programming and establishes a set of priorities to guide the investment of public resources in support of the recreation program vision.



Opportunities and Challenges

Neighborhood Diversity

The population is not spread evenly across all of Bellevue's neighborhoods. Downtown Bellevue offers the opportunity for an urban lifestyle preferred by some residents. BelRed and the western edge of Wilburton are developing into dense mixed-use centers as well. At the same time, Bellevue is home to many low-density neighborhoods with detached homes and small apartment complexes and townhomes. Parks designed for urban areas differ substantially from those designed to serve lower density residential areas. A variety of parks, recreation facilities and services are needed to serve people in Bellevue's diverse neighborhoods. Adding parks to meet the needs of residents that are currently underserved as well as future residents will add complexity and richness to the overall system.

Regional Partnerships

The city pursues a variety of partnerships to provide park facilities and programming of a diverse nature to meet needs of the community and changing recreation trends. Establishment of greenways is one example where partnerships are currently used. Greenways provide important active transportation linkages between neighborhoods, schools, parks and activity areas. The city is actively pursuing a coordinated system of greenways that provide multiple benefits for residents of the community and



the natural environment. Examples of major greenway initiatives are the Eastrail corridor and the Mountains to Sound Greenway. The city is working with regional partners to design a new separated trail facility extending the entire length of the city from north to south in the case of the Eastrail corridor and east to west along the I-90 corridor with the Mountains to Sound Greenway. As the community continues to grow, additional partnerships will be needed that provide funding, land and innovative options to create accessible, inclusive and varied parks and recreation opportunities.

Serving All Areas of the City

While Bellevue's park system is generally well-distributed throughout the community, several areas of the city are less served by parks and trails than others. For example, the Eastgate area south of I-90 included no park facilities at the time of annexation in 2012. The Parks and Open Space System Plan identifies underserved areas of the city and includes a plan for increasing access to the parks system.

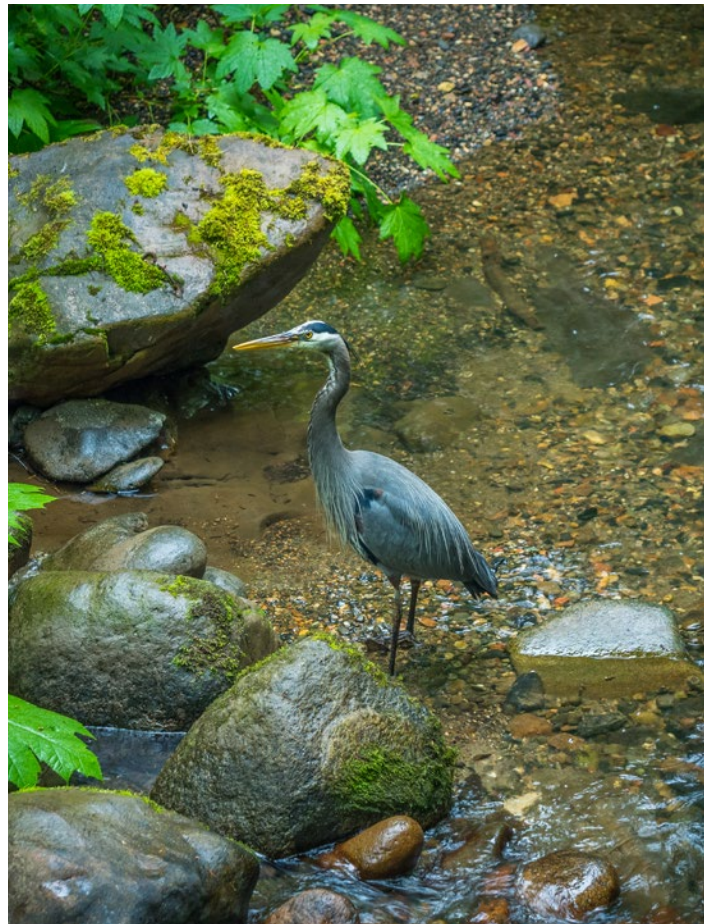
Rising Land Costs and Land Scarcity

There are competing demands for the fixed supply of land within the city. As commercial and residential development continues to occur, land for parks and open space becomes scarcer and more expensive. At the same time, Bellevue needs to continue to acquire new park land to maintain and increase access to parks and natural areas. The resulting high cost of land across the city, particularly in Downtown and redeveloping areas of BelRed and Wilburton, along with the scarcity of



large tracts of undeveloped land, point to a future of smaller, targeted acquisitions. Such acquisitions would make it difficult to fully serve community needs, put pressure on existing larger parks in the system and limit the ability to satisfy new recreation trends that may require large facilities.

In response, there are opportunities for the city to reduce impacts of land scarcity. Bellevue will need to look for ways to increase acquisition, dedication or other public interests in park land through the private development process. Connectivity of open space is a priority through the development process. For land acquired, options will be assessed to maximize available space that does not contain sensitive natural resources. This may include shared park-use facilities or improvements that could expand the use of facilities. In some cases, the alignment of multiple city objectives under one project may bring together resources to acquire or develop larger properties for public recreation use. Given the increasing cost and scarcity of land, the city will work creatively with many partners to continue to increase access to parks and provide varied recreation opportunities for the community.



Stewardship of Facilities and Natural Resources

Bellevue prides itself on having well-maintained facilities and strong natural resource management through its parks and open space system. However, with additional growth in the area there is likely to be increased demand and use of parks facilities that may result in their degradation if maintenance and land stewardship resources are not maintained at a high level.

Resource stewardship also provides an opportunity for Bellevue to further the “City in a Park” image. Opportunities may arise in parks to plant trees or restore a stream. As parks are developed there is an eye towards taking advantage of natural water infiltration and installing green stormwater infrastructure where needed. When constructing or renovating buildings the city strives to use sustainable materials and practices. In the face of climate change, Bellevue parks provide an example for environmental stewardship.



Parks, Recreation and Open Space Policy Summary

The Parks, Recreation and Open Space element contains policies that guide the acquisition, development and operation of Bellevue's parks and open space system. It also contains policies for recreation programs and the provision of community services. Policies are separated into four categories according to different areas of service to the Bellevue community.

Parks and Open Space System

Bellevue values equitable access to the parks system, providing new recreation opportunities that serve the diverse needs of the Bellevue community, protecting environmentally sensitive areas and maximizing available resources, such as land, funding and partnership opportunities.

Recreation and Community Services

Bellevue recognizes that use of the park system is maximized by offering a wide variety of education, recreation and social programming for all members of the community. Activities address all ages and provide culturally specific recreational pursuits as well as inter-generational opportunities.

Stewardship

The community values conserving and protecting natural resources. Bellevue works to maintain parks and open spaces for their recreational uses as well as for their beauty and contribution to a functioning ecosystem.

Maintenance, Renovation and Redevelopment

Bellevue has a long-standing tradition of providing impeccably maintained and high-functioning parks, trails and open space.



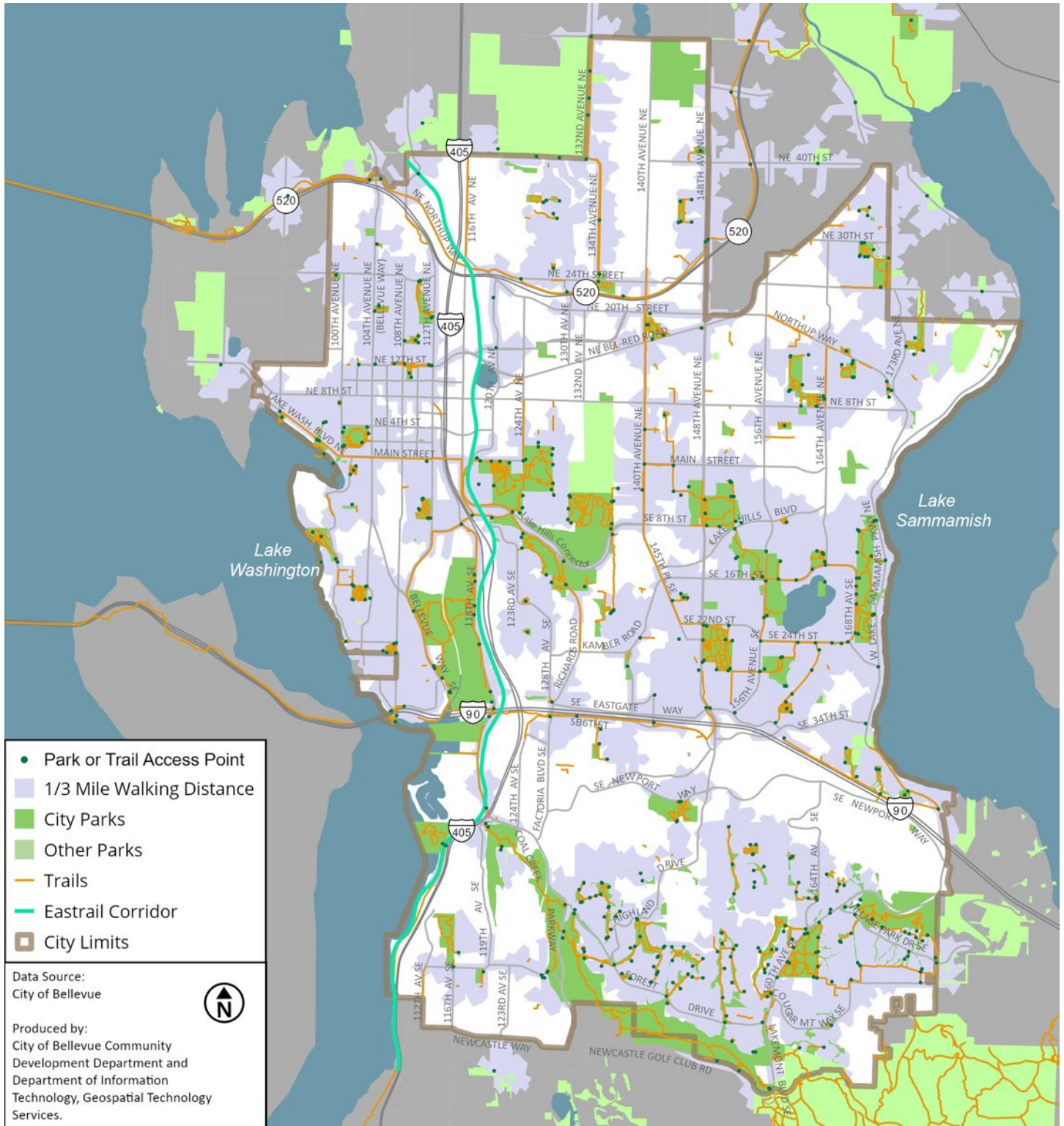
Map PA-1. Parks, Open Space, Community Centers and Trails

Bellevue works to expand and connect the parks and open space system. The map shows the system as of 2024.



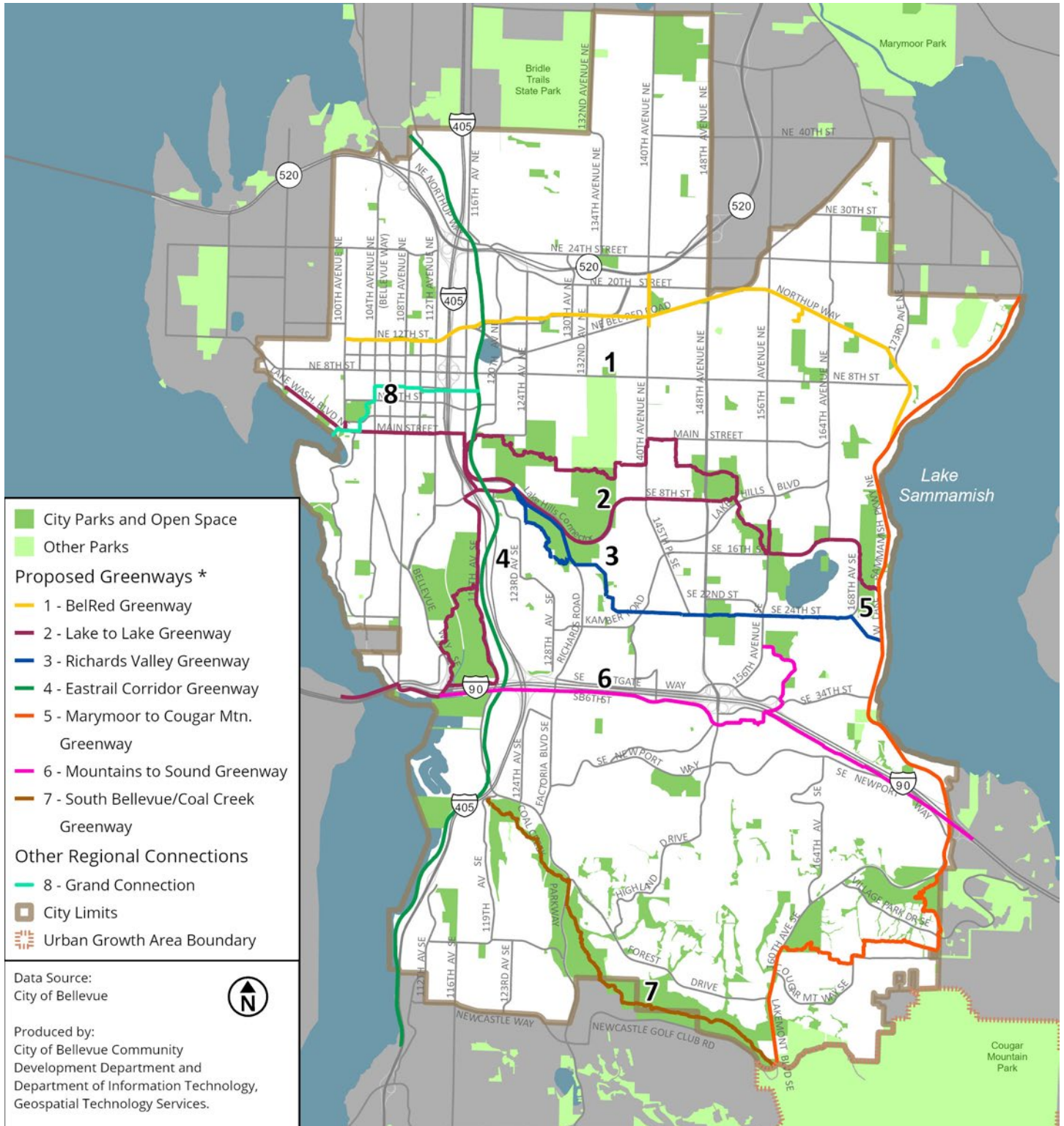
Map PA-2. Park Access

The map shows areas of the city that are within a 1/3 mile of a public park or trail access point. Bellevue continues to work to increase access to parks and trails for all residents.



Map PA-3. Regional Park Facilities and Greenway Connections

The regional park facilities and greenways in Bellevue connect the city with the rest of the region. Please refer to the Parks and Open Space System Plan for more details.



GOAL & POLICIES

Goal

To build a healthy community through an integrated and accessible system of exceptional parks, natural areas and recreation opportunities.

Policies

Parks and Open Space

- PA-1.** Establish a coordinated and connected system of open space and greenways throughout the city that provide multiple benefits including preserving natural systems, protecting wildlife habitat and corridors, enhancing scenic character, and providing land for recreation.
- PA-2.** Obtain land throughout the community to meet present and future parks and open space needs, with emphasis on providing park land concurrent with growth and density of urban neighborhoods, in alignment with the Parks and Open Space System Plan.
- PA-3.** Equitably distribute a variety of parks, community centers and other indoor and outdoor recreation facilities throughout the city, with consideration of underserved areas and those neighborhoods expected to experience the most growth.
- PA-4.** Design parks and facilities to maximize available space and benefits for users, including offering parks with multiple functions and implementation of shared use facilities.
- PA-5.** Increase safe, non-motorized access between dwellings and parks, trails and open space through development of additional facilities and mobility improvements.
- PA-6.** Connect Bellevue's parks and trails to the regional system of nearby state, King County and neighboring city parks, greenways, trails and facilities.
- PA-7.** Obtain, for preservation, natural areas that are sensitive to development or represent a valuable ecological resource to the community.
- PA-8.** Acquire and develop waterfront property to increase public access to Bellevue's lakes.
- PA-9.** Where in alignment with parks and open space goals, maximize use of public lands by collaborating with other city projects and programs to incorporate utility, storm drainage, underutilized right-of-way and other public lands into the parks and open space system.
- PA-10.** Develop partnerships with other public agencies, non-profits and the private sector to provide and fund parks, open space, and cultural and recreation facilities in the city.

- PA-11.** Actively seek funding from a variety of sources to help implement a park acquisition and development program using tools such as levies, grants, impact fees, special taxing districts or other methods.
- PA-12.** Pursue private dedication of land and funds for park related purposes through a variety of methods such as donation, easement and land use code incentives.
- PA-13.** Encourage a network throughout the city of privately funded and managed facilities that serve recreation and cultural needs and may supplement or link with facilities and programs in the public system.
- PA-14.** Develop safe pedestrian and bicycle linkages between neighborhoods and major natural areas, recreation facilities, schools and commercial centers.
- PA-15.** Coordinate with Eastrail Corridor owners to develop, operate and maintain park and open space amenities in the Corridor, in addition to the multiuse trail, in areas where there is an identified need for added park and open space access.
- PA-16.** Assess needs and develop recreational facilities to meet demand for growing recreation and leisure activities, based upon user trends, demographics and community input.
- PA-17.** Use a community informed planning process to guide substantial development or redevelopment of a park property.
- PA-18.** Provide accessible signage and wayfinding tools to direct individuals to park facilities from nearby streets and trails in order to promote and facilitate public use of parks.
- PA-19.** Acquire new parks and develop additional public gathering spaces that could accommodate large events distributed across areas of the city near mass transit.
- PA-20.** Support development of elements of the Grand Connection that provide spaces for gathering and recreation, such as the Meydenbauer Bay waterfront and a lid park over I-405, as well as connections to parks and greenways.

Recreation and Community Services

- PA-21.** Provide a variety of services and programs accessible to all throughout the city with special emphasis on underserved groups including low-income households, youth, individuals with disabilities and older adults.
- PA-22.** Provide opportunities for individuals to develop a sense of community through services, programs, events and volunteer activities, including opportunities that encourage cross-cultural and inter-generational interaction.
- PA-23.** Offer programs that are tailored to the unique resources, land and facilities within the city's parks and open space system.
- PA-24.** Use parks to celebrate, acknowledge and preserve the full local history, including that of native populations through park design, signage, programming and cultural landscape conservation.

- PA-25.** Develop partnerships with non-profit organizations in planning, developing and utilizing facilities.
- PA-26.** Develop partnerships with the public school districts to utilize school sites to provide recreation and cultural facilities.
- PA-27.** Collaborate with school districts and private and non-profit providers to deliver a coordinated array of recreation, athletic instruction, arts, gathering spaces and community services.
- PA-28.** Promote partnerships with public and private service providers to meet cultural, recreational, and social needs of the community.
- PA-29.** Explore provision of human services at recreation facilities and community centers when they complement the site’s recreational and cultural programming.
- PA-30.** Actively solicit community input in the planning, delivery and evaluation of services and programs to ensure that they are relevant, equitable and accessible.
- PA-31.** Based upon data trends and inclusive outreach, monitor and respond to the community’s evolving recreation and community service needs to ensure a mix of relevant and effective facilities that meet the needs of a diverse population, including programs that are culturally specific or promote intercultural exchange.

See also Human Services policies related to facilitating services, [HS-5](#) to [HS-8](#).

Stewardship

- PA-32.** Design, construct, operate and maintain parks and facilities to preserve the ecology of natural systems.
- PA-33.** Seek opportunities to integrate natural drainage practices and green stormwater infrastructure into park design and management to provide community amenities and watershed benefits.
- PA-34.** Protect and retain, in a natural state, significant trees and vegetation in publicly and privately-dedicated greenbelt areas.
- PA-35.** Manage park lands to increase ecological health of tree canopy across the city, where appropriate and backed by planning and analysis.
- PA-36.** Seek opportunities to restore natural areas within parks and open space.
- PA-37.** Manage Bellevue’s forest resources, including street trees, formal plantings and self-sustaining natural stands, to enhance their ecological function and ensure their long term vitality.
- PA-38.** Provide environmental stewardship and nature education programs to increase the community’s awareness, understanding and appreciation of Bellevue’s natural environment, while also informing the community about climate change threats and ways to prepare and build resilience to these changes.

See also Utilities policies related to stormwater management [UT-34](#) to [UT-38](#).

See also Climate and Environment policies related to urban forestry, [CL-16](#) to [CL-24](#).

- PA-39.** Develop, fund, and maintain streetscape and arterial landscaping along transportation corridors that provides valuable aesthetic, environmental, traffic calming and storm water management benefits helping maintain Bellevue’s “City in a Park” character.

Maintenance, Renovation and Redevelopment

- PA-40.** Conserve energy, water and other natural resources, and practice efficient and environmentally responsible maintenance and operation procedures.

See also Capital Facilities policies on high performance facilities, [CF-15](#) to [CF-24](#).

- PA-41.** Evaluate existing parks and facilities, and renovate, where appropriate, to maximize efficient maintenance and operating practices, improve safety and accessibility for all users, and to reduce, where feasible, the impacts on adjacent properties.

- PA-42.** When feasible, install, renovate or replace facilities using materials, construction and operation methods that meet or exceed green building certification or other performance standards and are known to be weather-resistant and longer lasting.

- PA-43.** Develop parks and facilities in a quality manner to assure attractiveness, full utilization and long term efficiency.

- PA-44.** Establish a funding plan for long term maintenance and operation before constructing park-related facilities.

- PA-45.** Eliminate and prevent uses of lands and facilities that impact or are not in alignment with the intended use or plan.