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Urban Design & the Arts

VISION

Bellevue creates extraordinary places for people and embraces the arts as an integral part of the community.

Through keen attention to urban design, Bellevue's built environment is contributing to the memorability, livability and character of the city and its neighborhoods. Rich expressions of arts and culture are found throughout the city. They are embraced by residents and are "must see" attractions for visitors.

URBAN DESIGN AND THE ARTS SCOPE

The Urban Design and the Arts element is about how the city guides the design of the built environment and provides programs and funding for all the services that support visual and performing arts in Bellevue.

INTRODUCTION

The Urban Design and the Arts element seeks to create a city that is inviting, attractive and functional for all people. It provides a design framework for community development and guidelines that reinforce and enhance the city's positive characteristics and honors each of its unique neighborhoods. It also provides a foundation that recognizes the value of culture and the arts in shaping the identity of the community. These goals and policies apply to the continued development of the arts and the built environment in Bellevue, including buildings, streets, sidewalks, parks, neighborhoods and plazas. Combining aspects of architecture, landscape design, public works, art, sustainability and transportation systems, the urban design policies complement corresponding parts of the Environment, Housing, Land Use, Parks, Recreation and Open Space and Transportation elements.



TODAY'S CONDITIONS AND TOMORROW'S PROJECTIONS

Urban Design Today and Tomorrow

Urban design is a priority in Bellevue through the thoughtful arrangement and function of the natural and built environment to create livable communities. Bellevue exemplifies a "City in a Park" with tree-lined streets, public art, vast parks, natural areas, wooded neighborhoods, two large lakes and mountain views. Within its stunning natural setting, Bellevue offers many diverse experiences across its neighborhoods.

Downtown

Bellevue's Downtown is a major regional economic center with dramatic increases in office, commercial and residential uses that have transformed the area into a thriving urban neighborhood with a large variety of services, amenities and nightlife. Sites and buildings in Downtown designed with interesting and memorable architecture and integrated public art help create an engaging and dynamic urban core. Pedestrian pathways, sidewalks, plazas, parks and open areas all work to make Downtown active and connected.

Mixed Use Centers

Development within Bellevue's Mixed-Use Centers will complement growth in Downtown. BelRed and Wilburton-East Main are planned to experience the greatest physical transformation into denser urban districts with improved multimodal connectivity and light rail access, as well as increased office, commercial and residential development. Crossroads, Eastgate and Factoria are planned for housing and commercial growth with walkable access to retail and services. High-quality urban design will help support the functionality and livability of all Mixed-Use Centers by being interesting, attractive, safe and reflective of neighborhood identity, and complementary to its surroundings.

Neighborhood Centers

Development within Bellevue's Neighborhood Centers can help enhance existing shopping and office centers as mixed-use neighborhood places with smaller locally-owned businesses and gathering spaces that residents can easily walk to, as well as housing opportunities. High-quality urban design will help create a distinct neighborhood feel and pedestrian-focused experience.

Residential Areas

Bellevue's residential areas are why many people choose to live here. Ensuring the continuity and enhancement of each area's unique identity will be important as redevelopment, investment and infill development occur.

Challenges and Opportunities

Development and growth present urban design and art-related challenges and opportunities for the city, including:

Continued Urbanization and Densification

With the majority of population and employment growth planned for Bellevue's Mixed-Use Centers, these areas will experience greater density.

Growth brings with it the challenge of ensuring that new development contributes positively to the city through design that is attractive, engaging and distinct. Designing new developments with context-appropriate landscaping, building design and public art, along with quality pedestrian facilities can improve the appearance and functionality of these developments and nearby areas, support and reinforce positive neighborhood qualities and improve livability.

Designing for All Ages and Abilities

In many parts of the city, Bellevue's population continues to get older, while in Downtown, the population is getting younger. Designing the built environment for all ages and abilities helps ensure that all residents, workers and visitors experience Bellevue as an inspiring, functional and welcoming place to be.

Protecting and Enhancing the Environment

The natural environment is a key part of Bellevue's identity. Incorporating natural elements into new development, especially in high-density areas, presents new opportunities for livability, sustainability and climate resilience. As the city changes, there are opportunities to enhance and expand the tree canopy, support landscape health and promote natural drainage as part of new development. Low-impact and sustainable development techniques can help protect and support natural features, reduce long-term environmental impacts and foster climate resilient communities.

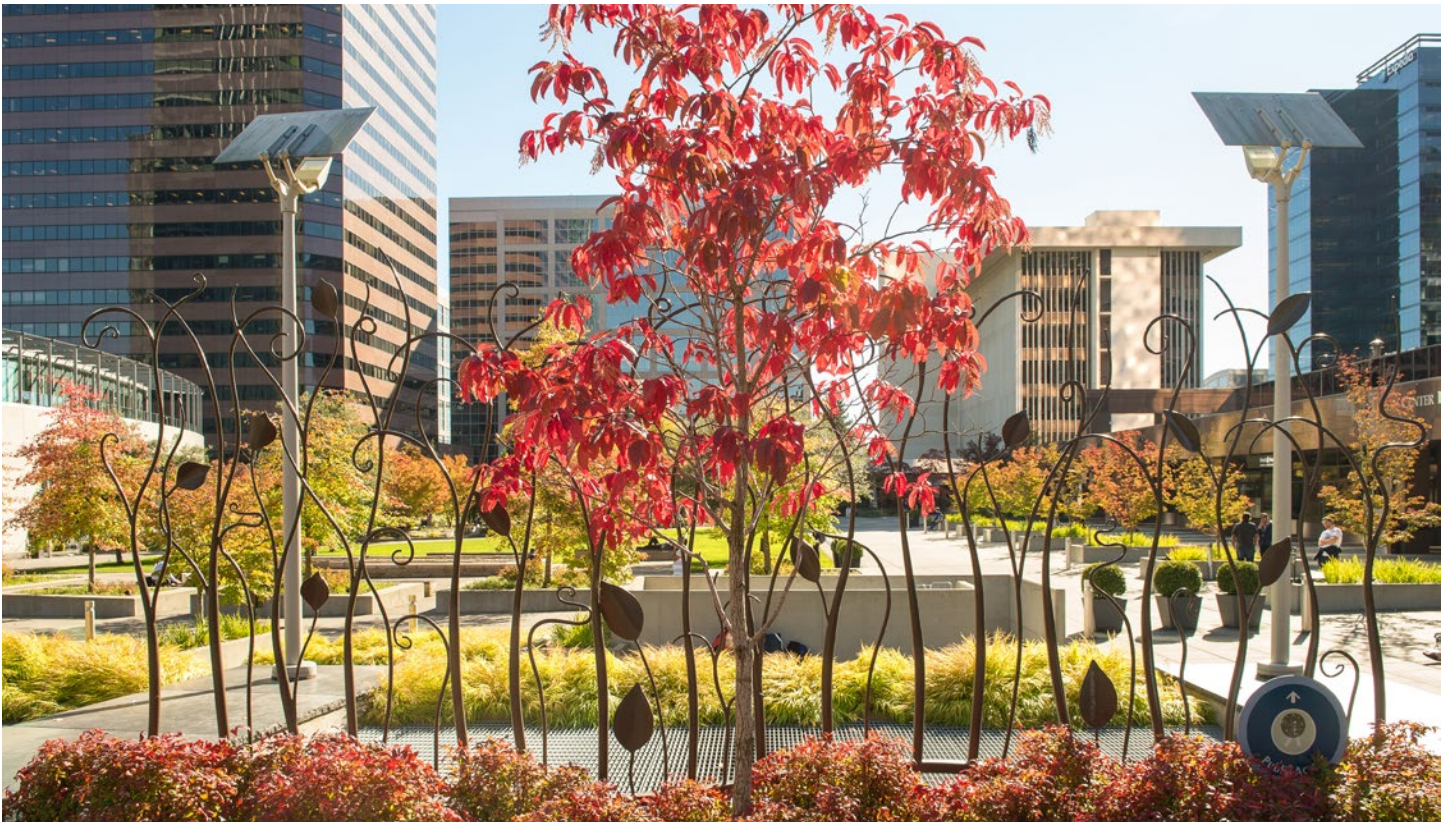
Community Gathering Places

A variety of welcoming community gathering places are needed throughout Bellevue. These can be a plaza, library, community center, place of worship, cafe, large or small park or shopping area. The design of these places, including the nearby streetscape, should facilitate safety and access, create a sense of belonging and community for all people and promote these areas as important community assets.

Access to Transit and Transit-Oriented Development

High-capacity transit, including bus and light rail, will provide quick and easy access throughout Bellevue and connect to Seattle, Redmond and the larger region. Transit stations will operate as points of arrival into Bellevue and its neighborhoods. Designing nearby buildings, sites and public areas with attractive and accessible pedestrian and bicycle connections to transit can create a more equitable, sustainable and multi-modal city. These connections can be highlighted with engaging architecture, landscaping, art and recreational features.





Urban Design & the Arts Policy Summary

The Urban Design and the Arts element addresses: Location-Specific Design, Street and Corridor Experience, Pedestrian Experience, Sustainable and Environmental Design, Arts and Culture and Landmarks and Historic Resources.

Location-Specific Design

As Bellevue evolves it is important to consider design qualities that apply consistently throughout the city to reinforce the citywide public experience of a “City in a Park”. There are design qualities applicable to Bellevue’s mixed use areas, including Mixed-Use Centers and Neighborhood Centers, that contribute to the city’s urban form, address potential impacts to surrounding areas and provide variety in building, site and streetscape design. Development within Mixed-Use Centers can complement the significant growth and major transit investments planned in these areas. Development within Neighborhood Centers can establish these locations as local community gathering places that contribute to neighborhood identity.

Street and Corridor Experience

Streets and corridors have a significant visual impact for all transportation users in connecting different parts of the city. Streetscape elements such as trees, landscaping, paving, lighting and public art contribute to an area’s design identity. Streets and corridors can incorporate Bellevue’s image as a “City in a Park” as well as elements of surrounding neighborhoods and natural areas.

Arts and Culture

The arts are an important expression of how people think of and experience the city and each other, especially as the city continues to grow more culturally diverse. Bellevue seeks to foster a strong arts and cultural community supported through a wide range of artists, art and cultural institutions, privately- and publicly-owned artwork, events and arts groups that can introduce people to new cultures, traditions and art forms. These experiences can be integrated into many locations, including streetscapes, entrances to neighborhoods, buildings, plazas, landscapes and parks.



Pedestrian Experience

The pedestrian experience can be enhanced by integrating amenities, such as weather protection, landscaping, public art, seating and other features, into both private development and public places to create a distinct sense of community and place. Well-designed public spaces throughout the city will offer people the opportunity to engage with their surroundings and gather with their community.

Sustainable and Environmental Design

Sustainable and environmental design is how the city leads by example to enhance sustainability and commits to environmental stewardship. The design of buildings, streets and open spaces provide opportunities for the city to think creatively about incorporating sustainable features through building materials, energy-efficient technologies and green stormwater infrastructure.

Landmarks and Historic Resources

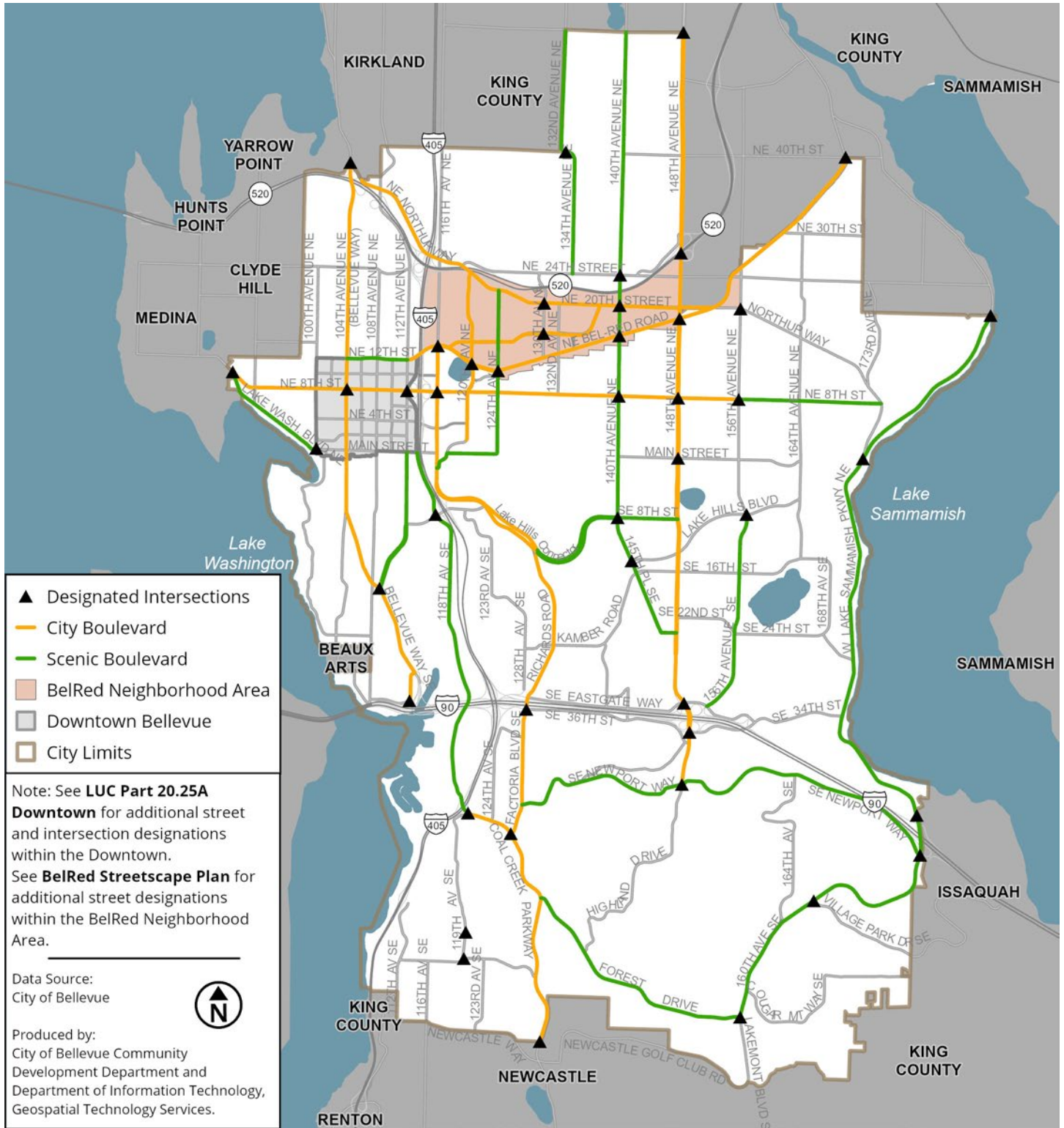
A major aspect of Bellevue's character is its history and there are several features in the city that are reminders of the past. These include the Wilburton railroad trestle over SE 8th Street; historic coal mines south of I-90; Winters House along Bellevue Way SE; the plants, wildlife and agriculture of Mercer Slough; unique large trees; and a number of outstanding private gardens that are recognized for their long-standing contribution to the community. The city also acknowledges its history within parks, streets, public places and designated sites.

Bellevue's history began long before the arrival of settlers into the area, and tribes can provide valuable expertise regarding culturally significant sites and resources of the ancestral lands in which they have lived and continue to live. In the more recent past, the Japanese American community have contributed to Bellevue's economic, social and cultural vitality—much of which has been lost due to wartime incarceration during World War II.

Preserving historic resources reinforces local values, elevates the contributions and affirms the presence of historically marginalized and underrepresented communities, highlights diverse and unique heritages, provides for continuity over time and contributes to a sense of place within the region.

Map UD-1. Urban Boulevard Network

This map designates streets and intersections that play a significant role in establishing Bellevue's visual identity.



GOAL & POLICIES

Goal

Foster a “City in a Park” that works for, celebrates and inspires its people through the design of the built environment, enhancement of its diverse neighborhoods and open spaces, preservation of its historic and natural features and support for the arts.

Policies

Citywide Public Experience

- UD-1.** Preserve and enhance trees throughout the city to retain tree canopy and foster the city’s image as a “City in a Park.”
- UD-2.** Integrate high quality and inviting public open spaces and publicly accessible privately owned open spaces into major development.
- UD-3.** Provide a network of public places of various sizes and types throughout the community that create a variety of experiences and accommodations.
- UD-4.** Enhance the appearance of all neighborhoods with targeted city programs and right-of-way improvements.
- UD-5.** Encourage the use of high-quality and durable building materials that contribute to excellence in architecture and have a sense of permanence.
- UD-6.** Encourage the creation and preservation of iconic visual reference points and gateway elements in the community through innovative site and building designs.
- UD-7.** Ensure sign design and placement is compatible with building architecture, neighboring commercial signs and with the visual identity of the community.
- UD-8.** Develop and maintain a public signage and wayfinding system throughout the city that reinforces the identity of Bellevue and its distinct neighborhoods.
- UD-9.** Use landscape designs that incorporate native and climate-resilient plants suitable to the Pacific Northwest.
- UD-10.** Ensure public places provide a sense of security, seating, landscaping, accessibility and connections to surrounding uses and activities.
- UD-11.** Incorporate universal design principles in the design of indoor and outdoor spaces to ensure these environments are usable to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of age and ability.

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

Mixed Use Areas

- UD-12.** Enhance and support a safe, active, connected and functional pedestrian environment that is engaging and attractive for all ages and abilities.
- UD-13.** Ensure that site and building design relates and connects to the surrounding community through architecture, landscaping and signage.

- UD-14.** Ensure that perimeter areas of more intense developments use site and building designs that reduce noise, wind, glare and shadow impacts on adjacent lower-scale development.
- UD-15.** Mitigate potential impacts of more intense developments to surrounding residential areas using landscaping, greenspace and other urban design elements as buffers.
- UD-16.** Encourage rooflines that create interesting and distinctive forms against the sky.
- UD-17.** Screen rooftop mechanical equipment, excluding solar panels, from public view through building architecture and other methods.
- UD-18.** Reduce the visual impact of parking lots, parking structures and service docks to public areas using architectural design, site design, landscaping, screening and appropriate lighting.
- UD-19.** Encourage site and building designs that integrate transit passenger amenities and provide convenient connections to existing or planned transit facilities.
- UD-20.** Preserve and enhance vegetation, giving special consideration to protecting groups of trees and associated undergrowth, specimen trees and other trees that define the natural characteristics of the area.
- UD-21.** Identify and preserve views of water, mountains, skylines or other unique landmarks from public places.

See also Land Use policies related to transit oriented development, [LU-28](#) to [LU-32](#).

Mixed Use Center Design

- UD-22.** Employ design guidelines to affect public and private development form and building placement to promote solar access and reduce wind impacts in public spaces.
- UD-23.** Link increased intensity of development with increased benefits for the public realm, such as pedestrian-oriented building design, through-block connections, public spaces, activities, openness and views.
- UD-24.** Minimize glare from reflective building material and outdoor lighting into adjacent areas.
- UD-25.** Support and encourage the development of the Grand Connection as a cultural corridor by designing and creating spaces for performance, installation, and temporary-based art and cultural installations.
- UD-26.** Employ design guidelines that promote a consistent aesthetic quality and urban experience for those who use the Grand Connection.
- UD-27.** Encourage the development of the Grand Connection vision to create a unique, defining and signature experience for active transportation recognizing that the pedestrian experience and pedestrian safety take precedence over other modes.

See also Land Use policies related to Mixed Use Centers, [LU-19](#) to [LU-23](#).

- UD-28.** Catalyze the activation of BelRed Arts District as a unique destination focused on arts, culture, innovation and nightlife.
- UD-29.** Support the organization and visibility of the BelRed Arts District, increase the number of affordable creative spaces and foster connection and collaboration with the BelRed community in accordance with the BelRed Arts District Implementation Plan.

Neighborhood Center Design

- UD-30.** Enhance Neighborhood Centers with exceptional landscaping, pedestrian and bicycle facilities and neighborhood specific design elements.
- UD-31.** Incorporate gateway features when reconstructing streets and/or sidewalks that define the experience of entering each Neighborhood Center.

See also Land Use policies related to Neighborhood Centers, [LU-16](#) to [LU-18](#).

Street and Corridor Experience

- UD-32.** Design key city boulevards to be visually distinct from other streets and to reinforce the image of Bellevue as a “City in a Park.” (See [Map UD-1](#))
- UD-33.** Design scenic boulevards adjacent to parks, natural areas and open spaces to reflect natural elements of the surrounding areas and neighborhoods. (See [Map UD-1](#))
- UD-34.** Use appropriate street tree species that are well adapted to urban street conditions and provide identity and continuity to street corridors. Adequate soil volume shall be provided to support tree health and limit damage to sidewalk and street infrastructure.
- UD-35.** Identify opportunities at designated intersections to highlight neighborhood identity. (See [Map UD-1](#))
- UD-36.** Work with the state and federal governments on new freeway projects to see that landscaping and lighting enhance the community’s image while limiting noise.
- UD-37.** Encourage freeway corridor and freeway-abutting development to include landscaping and design features that enhance the community’s image.

Pedestrian Experience

- UD-38.** Provide opportunities to enhance pedestrian and other mobility connections between buildings and public spaces through the development process.
- UD-39.** Provide design or art treatments for blank elevations and/or walls that are visible from the public realm.
- UD-40.** Provide both weather protection and access to sunlight in pedestrian areas and public places.

- UD-41.** Include clearly visible, safe and accessible walkways from street sidewalks and parking areas to building entrances and through large commercial blocks and developments.
- UD-42.** Ensure that walkway and trail furnishings do not interfere with pedestrian and bicycle circulation.

Sustainable and Environmental Design

- UD-43.** Utilize greenroofs and walls where they enhance the character of Bellevue as a “City in a Park” and soften the visual impact of development.
- UD-44.** Integrate low impact development principles early in the site design and development process to reduce the environmental impact of impervious surfaces and integrate into the design of the adjacent area.
- UD-45.** Promote water conservation in landscape and irrigation system designs.
- UD-46.** Incorporate interpretative or educational materials to highlight sustainable design components.
- UD-47.** Incorporate principles of biophilic design into public and private development.

See also Climate and Environment policies related to low impact development, [CL-59](#) to [CL-64](#).

Arts and Culture

- UD-48.** Cultivate public art that enhances neighborhood identity, builds community and engages the community in the artistic process.
- UD-49.** Encourage private and public developers to integrate art into the design of the public areas of their projects.
- UD-50.** Cultivate art and arts programs that facilitate involvement, engagement, communication, understanding and respect among the city’s diverse population.
- UD-51.** Support and encourage development, display and performance opportunities for a wide range of artistic expression throughout the city.
- UD-52.** Provide for a wide array of arts and cultural facilities that serve the city and the Eastside.
- UD-53.** Support and encourage lifelong arts education for all skill levels.
- UD-54.** Expand the city’s public art collection and involve the community in the selection of new major items.
- UD-55.** Support artists and arts groups working in the community through city programs.
- UD-56.** Provide for affordable space for artists and arts groups to practice, create, teach, perform and present their art.
- UD-57.** Encourage and enhance arts and cultural opportunities within Neighborhood Centers.

See also Land Use policies related to Neighborhood Centers, [LU-16](#) to [LU-18](#).

- UD-58.** Use art treatments, such as box wraps, where it can extend the usable life and deter vandalism of city owned equipment and facilities.
- UD-59.** Develop a process for designating festival streets that can be temporarily closed to vehicular traffic for pedestrian-oriented activities.
- UD-60.** Support partnerships and spaces for cross-cultural programming that contribute to intercultural engagement, learning and exchange.
- UD-61.** Recognize and affirm diverse heritages within the community through interpretative materials, artistic expression and placemaking.

Landmarks and Historic Resources

- UD-62.** Preserve, enhance and interpret Bellevue's historical identity.
- UD-63.** Consider establishing a local preservation program to increase historic resources protections.
- UD-64.** Develop opportunities for preservation, rehabilitation and adaptive reuse of historically significant sites and structures and education about those sites.
- UD-65.** Identify and protect historic and cultural sites and structures from disasters and climate hazards.
- UD-66.** Establish a process of conducting historic surveys that identify, document and evaluate historic properties.
- UD-67.** Coordinate with affected tribes and agencies regarding planning and development activities that may impact significant natural, cultural, or archaeological resources.
- UD-68.** Work with tribes and other historically marginalized or underserved communities to raise awareness of and protect historically and culturally valuable resources to these communities.