



photo by Stanton J Stephens

# Neighborhoods

## VISION

**Bellevue is a community of diverse, vibrant, and resilient neighborhoods.**

Bellevue's neighborhoods are well known for their distinctiveness, high-performing schools, safety, natural beauty amenities and opportunities that provide a high quality of life. Housing options abound, with many choices in ranges of affordability. Residents appreciate their neighborhoods for the strong connections among neighbors that contribute to making Bellevue home.

### **NEIGHBORHOODS ELEMENT SCOPE**

The Neighborhoods element is about how the city supports safe and inclusive interactions between people in Bellevue.

## INTRODUCTION

Bellevue is a city of diverse neighborhoods, each with distinct characteristics reflecting a range of development types and scales – from smaller homes to the growing vertical neighborhoods of Downtown and BelRed. Each neighborhood has a rich history and community traditions while also being dynamic and responsive to the changing needs of its residents. Bellevue’s neighborhoods are home to a diverse and well-connected community of neighbors with local connections to schools, stores, parks, trails and the natural beauty that defines the Pacific Northwest. The city’s role is to ensure that all neighborhoods enjoy a high-quality environment that facilitates a safe, welcoming and accessible community, promote strong community connections, are adaptable to changing needs and conditions and support a unique sense of place.

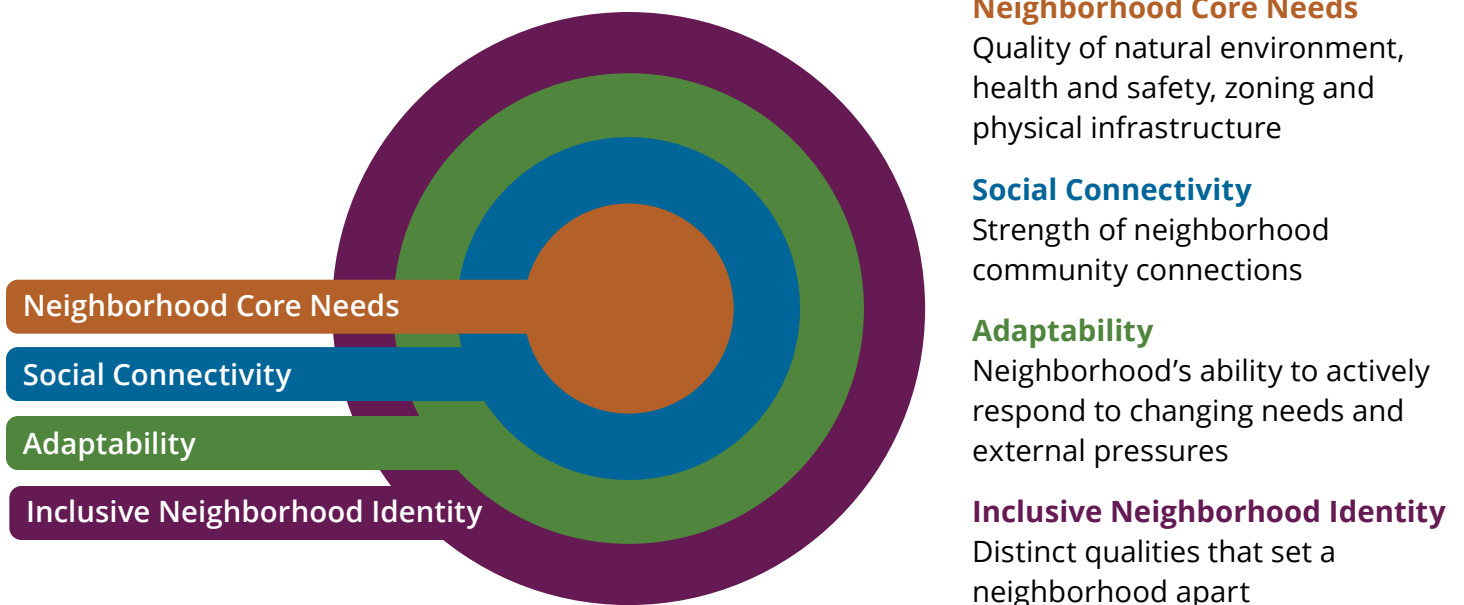
Policies to support Bellevue neighborhoods’ health and vitality are integrated throughout the Comprehensive Plan. The Neighborhoods element provides an additional framework to consider issues that go beyond a neighborhood’s

basic needs. The Neighborhoods element also establishes policies for maintaining and updating the city’s Neighborhood Area (Subarea) plans, as defined by the state Growth Management Act.

## ELEMENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL NEIGHBORHOOD

As depicted in Figure NH-1, four factors shape neighborhood quality: Neighborhood Core Needs, Social Connectivity, Adaptability and Inclusive Neighborhood Identity. In the center is Neighborhood Core Needs: the natural environment, services and physical infrastructure that provide for basic needs. Surrounding that core are the people and the social connections that make up the heart of the community. Adaptability is the ability of that local community to respond to changes (both internal and external) that impact its health and development. Inclusive neighborhood identity comprises the distinct physical amenities and artistic, cultural or natural qualities that set each neighborhood apart and provide a ‘sense of place.’

**Figure NH-1. Key Elements of a Successful Neighborhood**



## Neighborhood Core Needs

All Bellevue neighborhoods share a common core of basic needs. Basic needs include a quality built environment that facilitates a safe, welcoming and accessible community; housing options to meet a range of community needs; and neighborhood centers, local businesses, schools, community centers and other “third places” for neighbors to meet. Connectivity within and among neighborhoods is necessary to provide access to schools, parks, businesses and trails. Neighborhoods depend on core city services to safeguard the health and safety of the community, provide appropriate zoning and regulations, steward natural resources and maintain vital infrastructure.

### Social Connectivity

Neighborhoods are made up of people. The strength of connectedness among neighbors contributes to residents’ quality of life. Social connectivity determines a neighborhood’s ability to resolve disputes, prepare for emergencies and climate-related hazards, deter crime, care for aging or vulnerable residents and have a collective voice to shape the amenities, planning and future of the community. Social connectivity helps the community bounce back from natural disasters or unforeseen tragic incidents. It is the social fabric that provides residents with a strong “sense of community” and place of belonging.

### Adaptability

Bellevue is a growing, international world-class city. Bellevue’s neighborhoods reflect its past, present and future. Bellevue’s neighborhoods are not static. They are dynamic communities that will continue to adapt and change while seeking to preserve what residents value most. They will grow with new schools, businesses, parks and amenities. They will reflect the market forces that respond to changing housing needs for Bellevue’s diverse community. Adaptable neighborhoods play an active role in responding to the changing needs and external pressures that impact their community.

## WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?

- Community members share safe, welcome and well maintained neighborhoods with convenient access to parks, trails, schools, local businesses, transit and a healthy natural environment.
- Neighbors enjoy a sense of belonging through participation in local neighborhood associations, community clubs, community centers, school organizations cultural and art-oriented organizations, and other organizations that support community connections.
- The city works with neighborhoods to respond to emerging concerns and changing conditions.
- New neighborhood plans equitably engage local communities to reflect area specific values, needs and priorities.

### Inclusive Neighborhood Identity

Bellevue values the distinct physical amenities and artistic, cultural or natural qualities of the city’s diverse neighborhoods, whether it is the vibrancy of Downtown, Crossroads and BelRed neighborhoods, the shoreline communities of West Lake Sammamish and Lake Washington, the hilltop neighborhoods of Cougar Mountain, Somerset and Newport Hills, the historic neighborhoods of Wilburton, Northtowne, Lake Hills and Woodridge, or the wooded neighborhoods of Enatai and Bridle Trails. Bellevue has sixteen neighborhood areas, including the changing areas of Downtown, BelRed and Eastgate. Each area is home to many smaller neighborhoods. The diversity of Bellevue’s neighborhoods is a city treasure—the unique look and feel of each neighborhood depends on its location, history and natural and built environment. At the same time, Bellevue prioritizes



inclusivity and equity and seeks to ensure neighborhoods remain accessible to residents of diverse backgrounds, abilities and incomes.

The city encourages and coordinates neighborhood participation in projects to enhance unique neighborhood identity. Neighborhood groups can partner with the city on features such as landscape plantings, signage, artwork and special paving on streets or sidewalks. Neighborhood engagement with the city shapes city planning and decision making on neighborhood improvements and determines how to enhance distinct neighborhood identities across the city.

## BELLEVUE'S 16 NEIGHBORHOODS

Bellevue has 16 neighborhood areas (Map NH-1), each containing a few to many smaller neighborhoods that cover the full extent of the city. Some of the neighborhood areas, like Downtown, are very urban with exclusively multi-family housing units and a lot of commercial and office space. Other neighborhoods, like Newport, are primarily residential with mostly one unit per lot and a small amount of commercial space that serves the needs of the local population. There are many neighborhoods in between with a mix of housing types and commercial areas. Each neighborhood area has a distinct identity that has evolved over time and continues to evolve as the people living and working in the area change and their needs shift.



# TODAY'S CONDITIONS AND TOMORROW'S PROJECTIONS

## Neighborhoods Today and Tomorrow

Each of Bellevue's 16 neighborhood areas is home to many smaller neighborhoods, reflecting a diversity of development types and scales. Bellevue has shown its commitment to neighborhoods by providing planning and services that have made these highly desirable places to live.

Factors that will affect the future of neighborhoods include:

- Bellevue's population is expected to grow significantly over the planning horizon of the Comprehensive Plan. This growth could mean changes to neighborhoods throughout the city.
- Neighborhoods want to enhance their unique identity, which is shaped by location and history.
- Bellevue's population will have changing needs, such as smaller households and older adults who want to stay in their neighborhood.
- A large portion of the city's future housing capacity is in Bellevue's multi-family and mixed use districts; however, statewide requirements will also enable more housing opportunities throughout the city.
- As Bellevue becomes denser, residents will continue to want safe, quality neighborhoods and access to schools, parks, trails, local stores and recreation.
- Future infrastructure investments will increase mobility options across Bellevue.
- Bellevue continues to grow more diverse, increasing the need for investments in social cohesion, community connections and creating a sense of belonging for all community members.

## Challenges and Opportunities

### Cycles of Private Investment

During upturns in the housing market, neighborhoods face increased private development and construction projects, redevelopment of single-family homes, increases in investment properties, group homes and rentals and increases in traffic. On the flip side, during economic downturns neighborhoods may face foreclosures, vacant properties, substandard maintenance and stalled commercial development. During all points in the economic cycle, city policies and planning help to protect and mitigate negative impacts of changing market conditions and provide benefits from new opportunities and amenities.

### Maintaining Safe and Welcoming Environments

Maintaining a high level of neighborhood safety depends on the strength of partnership between the city and local community members. This includes on-going attention to residential crime prevention, emergency preparedness, public safety services, walkability, lighting, social cohesiveness and celebration of difference.

### Increasing Diversity

Bellevue's residents are increasingly diverse, enhancing the cultural fabric of the city while also adding layers of complexity to the community life of Bellevue's neighborhoods. This diversity provides opportunities for residents to engage cross-culturally in community life. Bellevue's neighborhoods need to provide places for local connection and cultural practices and the city needs to encourage neighborhood social cohesiveness by supporting the neighborhood associations, community clubs, faith communities, park and community services, schools, cultural and art-oriented organizations, non-profits and businesses that invest in Bellevue's community and build a sense of belonging.

## Capacity for Problem-Solving

Neighborhood capacity to collectively address changing needs and external stresses depends on the organization of community groups, neighborhood associations and local leaders. Neighborhoods with active associations that are familiar with city processes and decision making are in a stronger position to solve problems. By providing clear channels of communication with neighborhoods, the city safeguards against unnecessary turmoil and gains local insight for planning and creative solution-making.

## Maintaining Inclusive Neighborhood Identity

As Bellevue continues to grow, the variety of expression, history and physical amenities in its neighborhoods will enrich the quality of life for the entire community. A balanced and nuanced approach will be necessary to accommodate expected growth and development while preserving neighborhood identity. Success will require balancing the needs of the whole city while avoiding a “one size fits all” approach to neighborhood planning that undermines neighborhood distinctiveness.



## Neighborhoods Policy Summary

Bellevue’s neighborhood policies establish clear guidance for how the City can promote successful neighborhoods and are organized around the following six themes:

### Neighborhood Core Needs

Successful neighborhoods are accessible to all, aesthetically cohesive, welcoming, safe and resilient against natural and climate hazards. To fulfill each neighborhood’s basic needs, the city must encourage a diverse mix of uses, provide a range of housing types at various affordability levels and increase neighborhood-scale resilience against climate hazards.

### Community Safety

Public safety for all community members is a top priority for Bellevue. To provide citywide community safety, the city must ensure safety services respond to growth, meet community needs and provide the necessary education and training to allow the community to be active participants in public safety.

### Social Connectivity

Bellevue understands that the success of its many diverse neighborhoods is largely due to the strong and vibrant communities within them. To support the social fabric of neighborhoods, the city must continue to support inclusive community connections that build a sense of belonging and community cohesion.

### Adaptability

Bellevue continues to grow and diversify. To meet the needs of a changing community, the City must support the resiliency and capacity of neighborhoods to enable equitable solutions to localized issues and respond to evolving needs and conditions at both neighborhood and citywide scales.

### Inclusive Neighborhood Identity

Part of what makes Bellevue unique are its many diverse neighborhoods. Each of Bellevue’s neighborhoods have unique physical amenities, natural environments, art and distinctive characteristics. To encourage

inclusive neighborhood identities and sense of place, the city must support community-driven neighborhood enhancement projects, art and culture, park and open space improvements and physical elements that enhance each neighborhood's distinct sense of place for everyone to enjoy.

### Neighborhood Area Planning

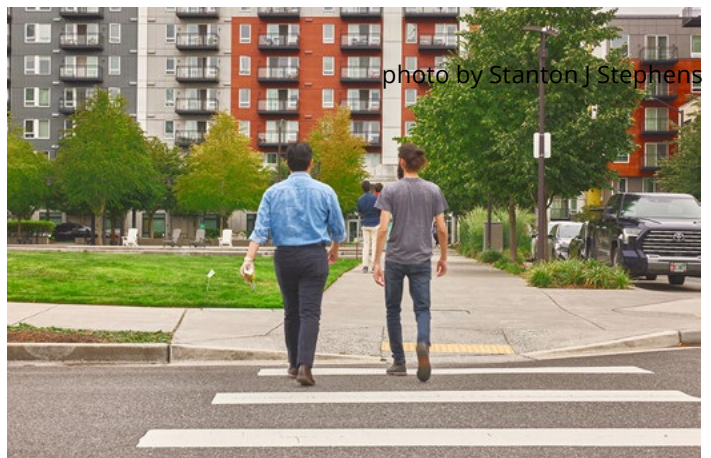
Bellevue plans for neighborhood areas through neighborhood area (subarea) plans. These plans have been an important tool for addressing the changing needs and conditions of specific parts of the city. Neighborhood areas include changes to subarea boundaries to better reflect today's neighborhood areas, and to facilitate long-range planning.

The Neighborhoods element provides policies to periodically update the neighborhood area (subarea) plans as conditions warrant. The city understands that not every neighborhood-specific concern is a citywide issue: some matters are best approached at a neighborhood-area scale, with awareness of a wider city context.



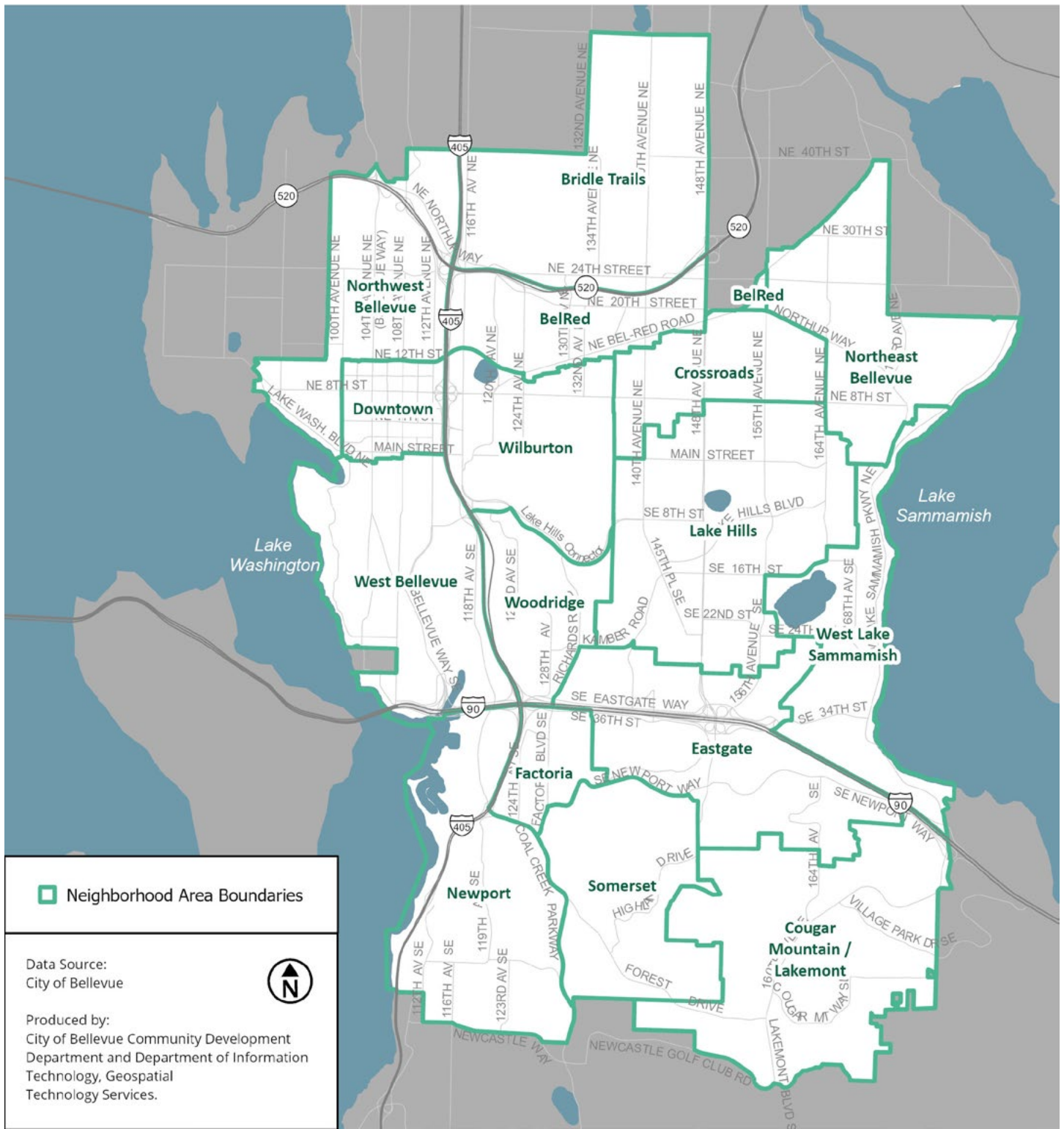
## HOW DO NEIGHBORHOOD AREA (SUBAREA) PLANS RELATE TO THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN?

Neighborhood area plans make up Volume 2 of the Comprehensive Plan. A neighborhood area plan articulates a vision—consistent with the citywide vision and policies in Volume 1—sets priorities and identifies future actions to realize the community's vision at the neighborhood level. The neighborhood area planning process seeks to equitably engage local communities to define specific values and policies. This planning process is also used to implement citywide policies at the neighborhood level.



# Map NH-1. Neighborhood Area Boundaries

Neighborhood Areas are used for planning and project administration. The Subarea Plan boundaries are updated to align with these boundaries as the plans are updated.





# GOAL & POLICIES

## Goal

To maintain and enhance the high quality of life in Bellevue's distinctive neighborhoods.

## Policies

The neighborhood policies below build from and add to the many neighborhood-directed policies found throughout the Comprehensive Plan. Policy direction found elsewhere in the Comprehensive Plan, while critical to neighborhoods, is not repeated here. See "Policy Connections" for extensive references.

## Neighborhood Core Needs

- NH-1.** Maintain all neighborhoods as safe, welcoming and accessible environments for all to enjoy.
- NH-2.** Support the creation of a variety of land uses to fulfill each neighborhood's basic needs, including:
  1. A range of housing types at various affordability levels;
  2. Access to basic needs such as groceries, pharmacies, child care and other essential services;
  3. Natural areas and open spaces; and
  4. Public places to gather like community centers and parks and private places to gather like churches and country clubs.
- NH-3.** Plan and prepare for the response, recovery and mitigation of potential disasters and hazards. Factor climate impacts into neighborhood emergency preparedness and enhance local capacity to respond to climate-related hazards.
- NH-4.** Incorporate equitable access to healthy food in all neighborhood areas by encouraging the location of healthy food purveyors, such as grocery stores, farmers markets and community food gardens in proximity to residential uses and transit facilities.

## Social Connectivity

- NH-5.** Promote inclusive community connections that strengthen the social fabric of neighborhoods, including support for organizations that foster community cohesion and sense of belonging.
- NH-6.** Support citywide initiatives to involve communities of color in identifying and promoting policies and projects to increase equity, inclusion and a sense of belonging within the city.

## Adaptability

- NH-7.** Provide multiple venues for two-way communication with community members to listen to and respond to emerging neighborhood opportunities and concerns.

**NH-8.** Support the capacity of local neighborhood communities to actively engage and respond to changing community needs and conditions at both neighborhood and citywide scales.

See also Community Engagement policies related to supporting good relationships, [CE-18](#) to [CE-21](#).

**NH-9.** Regularly track changes in demographics and neighborhood indicators to improve city responsiveness to changing conditions and community needs across all neighborhoods.

## Community Safety

**NH-10.** Ensure police, fire and emergency services provide high levels of public safety that respond to growth and changing community needs.

**NH-11.** Equip residents, businesses and community service providers through education and training to be active participants in public safety (including, but not limited to, emergency preparedness, crime prevention, first aid, fire prevention and climate-related hazards).

**NH-12.** Increase firearm safety through communications, education, partnerships and law enforcement outreach with the aim to reduce firearm violence.

**NH-13.** Involve the community in creating supportive systems for deterring racism and hate crimes.

## Inclusive Neighborhood Identity

**NH-14.** Support efforts to enhance the distinct physical amenities and neighborhood elements that bring artistic, cultural or natural qualities to life across Bellevue's diverse neighborhoods.

**NH-15.** Provide programs and support for community members to make a difference in local neighborhood improvements. This includes ways to direct neighborhood enhancement projects, neighborhood identity signage, gateways, park enhancements, neighborhood art and maintenance of public right-of-ways.

**NH-16.** Enable neighborhood-tailored, equitable solutions to localized issues while ensuring they meet citywide responsibilities.

## Neighborhood Area Planning

**NH-17.** Use the neighborhood area planning process to implement citywide policies adopted within the comprehensive plan.

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

**NH-18.** Periodically update neighborhood area plans consistent with the planning boundaries shown in Map N-1. For any given site, the 2014 subarea plan policies remain in effect until and unless they have been superseded by new planning area boundaries and policies.

**NH-19.** Use the neighborhood area planning process to equitably engage local communities to define neighborhood area specific values and policies.