

City of Bellevue Neighborhood Character Project

Addressing the Impacts of Infill & Redevelopment

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is the purpose of the Neighborhood Character project?

The purpose of the Neighborhood Character project is to identify, address, and develop a strategy to manage the impacts of neighborhood *infill and **redevelopment that may compromise or threaten the character of existing single family neighborhoods. The city wants to ensure that the quality of life and character of Bellevue neighborhoods remain strong.

The Neighborhood Character initiative does not attempt to prevent change. Change is inevitable and desirable. This initiative seeks to encourage continued reinvestment in Bellevue neighborhoods while creating a framework for graceful transitions and sensitive development.

How did this project come about?

The Neighborhood Character project emerged from the concerns of Bellevue residents. Residents approached Councilmembers and staff with their concerns about development activity, and the resulting changes in neighborhood character and other negative impacts on neighborhoods. Citizens were apprehensive about what they were seeing, especially in neighborhoods with a preponderance of teardown activity.

The Neighborhood Character project was included in the City Council's 2007-08 Neighborhood Livability Action Agenda – a strategy that focuses city resources on addressing residents' concerns about their neighborhoods.

What has the City done?

At the direction of City Council, staff investigated residents' complaints about the perceived impacts of infill and redevelopment.

City staff held focus group discussions, conducted interviews with developers, and asked stakeholders to discuss the changes in neighborhoods and impacts of development activity. Out of these discussions, some themes quickly emerged – neighborhoods are changing, trees are disappearing, construction is disruptive.

To obtain objective information about the perceived impacts of single family infill and redevelopment on neighborhood character, staff collected single family development data from multiple sources (e.g., Bellevue's permitting database, King County Assessor, development files, GIS aerial photos, site visits).

First, staff collected single family development data from 1,031 new home construction permits (issued Jan. 1, 2000 through Dec. 31, 2006). Data showed:

- 432 of 1,031 (42%) new single family residence permits were categorized as teardown (demo/rebuild) redevelopment.
- 322 of 432 (75%) demo/rebuilds were in northwest & west Bellevue.
- 87% of new homes being built in Bellevue are 3,000-7,000 square feet.
- Nearly one-quarter of new homes built in 2006 were larger than 5,000 sq ft.

Next, staff conducted a comprehensive analysis of single family building projects in the sample years 2004 and 2005. Following is a summary of data from the review of 273 files:

- o 4268 sq ft – Average livable square footage of a new home
- o 97% – percentage of lots with significant loss of vegetation (e.g., major tree removal, extensive removal of vegetation)
- o 98% – percentage of lots with a significant amount of added impervious surface (e.g., sport courts, new, widened or circular driveways, parking pads, large patios)
- o 96% – percentage of demo/rebuild homes departing from original architecture in style, height, or urban form
- o 163% – average increase in size of single family demo/rebuild development (e.g., 2,000 sq ft house replaced by 5,260 sq ft house)

Staff presented research findings, transcripts from focus group discussions and developer interviews, correspondence from citizens, and comparative research from other cities to the City Council and the Planning Commission.

How might these impacts be addressed?

The Planning Commission has proposed several preliminary recommendations to address these impacts, including:

- o *Changes to preserve trees and greenscape* – requiring tree retention on redeveloped single family lots, and requiring that front yards include some greenscape.
- o *Actions to address scale and character of redeveloped homes* – changing height measurement methods, changing requirements for placement of heating and air conditioning units, restricting “pop-up” carports, establishing special standards for homes exceeding a size threshold (sometimes referred to as “mega-house”), and restricting lot combinations.
- o *Steps to address construction impacts* – requiring regular debris removal from building sites and clean-up of abandoned building sites, requiring on-site signs to inform neighbors of construction codes and requirements, avenues for expressing concerns, and contact numbers.

Will the recommendations lead to changes in city codes? If so, when?

Yes, this effort will most likely result in some changes to city codes. These would only take effect after extensive public discussion and approval by the Planning Commission, the City Council, and the East Bellevue Community Council (within the community council boundaries).

Discussion of some of the code amendments is scheduled to begin in September 2007. Adoption would take place in two phases, with the earliest changes taking effect at the beginning of 2008.

Will this project detract from private property values?

It is important to the City to respect private property rights while also responding to the needs of the community. The City encourages neighborhood investment. Redevelopment and reinvestment are essential to maintaining the vitality and appeal of our residential communities. However, some redevelopment practices, when carried out in ways that are insensitive to neighborhood character, can harm existing

residents' quality of life and property values. This initiative seeks to find the right balance between encouraging reinvestment and deterring development practices that unnecessarily harm existing neighborhood character and quality. Hopefully, this will be the right balance to protect property values for all.

How can members of the public get involved?

Questions and comments are welcome. Individuals and groups may address comments to the Planning Commission in person at the Commission's regular meetings, by e-mail to jchristensen@bellevuewa.gov, or in writing to Planning Commission, PO Box 90012, Bellevue, WA 98009. Questions can be addressed to Cheryl Kuhn, 425-452-4089, ckuhn@bellevuewa.gov.

If you would like to receive regular updates about this project, please call Neighborhood Outreach, 425-452-6836, or send an e-mail to NeighborhoodOutreach@bellevuewa.gov and your name will be added to the *Interested Parties List*.

Definitions

*** Infill** - refers to "filling in" vacant land in existing developed areas. Short platting a lot and building a house on a vacant lot are examples of infill development.

**** Redevelopment** (aka demo-rebuild or teardown development) - refers to the practice of tearing down an existing structure and replacing it with another structure.

***** Mega-house** - the definition of a mega-house varies widely. Some define a mega-house simply by its size. Others define it as a structure that is out of proportion to the size of the lot on which it is built.