

Urban Design Element

GOALS:

1. To create an attractive, lively, and gracious city for people.
2. To promote an image of quality and distinction in the harmonious blending of the natural and built environments.
3. To create and develop public and semi-public spaces to attract people.
4. To give visual prominence to pedestrian facilities and environments.
5. To develop a functional and aesthetically pleasing urban Downtown.
6. To strengthen residential neighborhood identity by defining edges and designating landmarks.
7. To provide compatible transitions between areas of different land use intensity and to “soften” new development where it adjoins less intensive uses.
8. To encourage and support the arts as a vital part of community life.
9. To soften the visual impact of the automobile on the city.

OVERVIEW

The Urban Design Element guides public and private development to create a city that is diverse, people oriented, aesthetically appealing, and functionally understandable. It provides a design framework for community development and guidelines for new construction and improvements while protecting the city’s positive characteristics. These goals and policies apply to three-dimensional aspects of the built environment in Bellevue: buildings, streets, sidewalks, parks, neighborhoods, plazas, etc. Urban design combines aspects of architecture, landscape architecture, public works, public art, and transportation systems. Implementation of these urban design policies will create an inviting and attractive city with a cohesive city image that entices people to more actively use their city.



The image of Bellevue is a “City in a Park”.

As Bellevue evolves it is important to preserve its inherent natural qualities while enhancing the existing urban areas. Bellevue is fortunate to have an attractive natural setting. It is bounded on two sides by large lakes, graced with tree-covered hillsides, and laced with streams, smaller lakes, and several large wetlands. Recent concentrations of development in the Downtown and in other commercial areas are emerging in striking contrast to the natural environment. This contrast exemplifies Bellevue's image as a "City in a Park."

This Element addresses four sections of urban design: **Design Quality, Public Places and Connections, Community Design,** and **Landmarks and Historic Resources.** Design Quality policies apply to the design of individual development. Public Places and Connections apply to the design of streets, parks, public facilities, etc. that are used by the general public. Community Design applies to parts of Bellevue where commercial and residential areas are joined to create smaller communities within the city which have a "sense of place." Landmarks and Historic Resources apply to those buildings, places, and landmarks that give Bellevue's identity more depth and relevance to its location and era.



Creative design features make Bellevue an attractive, lively and gracious city for people.

Design Quality

High quality design is as important in the details of a building as a development's contribution is to the urban form of the area. As Bellevue becomes more urban, existing vegetation and new landscaping become more important to contribute to Bellevue's image of a "City in a Park." All types of open space can be attractive places, focal points, and provide contrasts to, or integrated with, the built environment. The result of these policies should be an environment for people that is stimulating and which balances both variety and consistency. Topics addressed in this section are: Site and Building Design, Vegetation and Landscaping, Open Space, and Signage and Wayfinding.

POLICIES

Site and Building Design

POLICY UD-1. Encourage high quality, attractive, architecturally appealing designs for major buildings in order to create distinctive visual reference points in the community.

POLICY UD-2. Support designs for the built environment that are visually stimulating and thoughtful and which convey excellence in architecture and workmanship, and durability in building materials.

POLICY UD-3. Encourage a variety of site and building designs which are compatible and consistent with surrounding development and that implement the policies of this Plan.



Major buildings can create distinctive visual reference points in the community.

POLICY UD-4. Ensure that development relates, connects, and continues design quality and site functions from site to site

Discussion: Examples are shared driveways, similar landscaping, pedestrian connections, similar building form, collective open and public space, and continuous pedestrian protection from weather. Assets and attributes of adjacent sites, when connected or combined, improve the overall urban design of the area.

POLICY UD-5. Include accessible and attractive places for the general public, employees and visitors to wait, to be outdoors, or to socialize in more intensive commercial development. Less intensive commercial development should include such places for employees and visitors.

POLICY UD-6. Design buildings located on the edge of public places using materials, forms, details and other architectural elements that will enrich the appearance of the places and encourage people to use them.

Discussion: The quality of the surrounding buildings, sidewalks, and vegetation is as important as the internal space of public places. This involves a consideration of appropriate use, building bulk and character, lighting, planting, signs, and other elements which compose the built environment. Building design should avoid stark

spaces, allow eye contact between people inside and outside buildings, and have attractive display windows.

POLICY UD-7. Encourage private and institutional developers to include artists on design teams and incorporate artwork into the public areas of their projects through the use of incentives.

POLICY UD-8. Design rooftop mechanical screening so that it is integral with building architecture. Consider the visual effects of technical advances such as satellite dishes, on building design.

POLICY UD-9. Use site design, landscaping, and appropriate lighting to reduce the visual impact of parking lots to public areas.

POLICY UD-10. Encourage public and private development to incorporate access to sunlight.

POLICY UD-11. Encourage architectural elements that provide for both rain cover and access to sunlight in pedestrian areas.

Discussion: Subtle elements such as awnings, arcades, and covered walkways can provide a choice of weather protection. Overhangs and recesses at entrances of buildings can also provide protection from the weather. Building materials that allow natural light into covered areas are encouraged.

POLICY UD-12. Place and design outdoor lighting around buildings, in parking lots, and along streets to prevent excessive glare into residential areas.

POLICY UD-13. Encourage water as an auditory and tactile design element in both the built and natural environment. In the built environment such features should be designed to minimize water loss and be required to utilize recirculating or recycled water.



Water may be used as an auditory and tactile design element.

Vegetation and Landscaping

POLICY UD-14. Encourage seasonal color plantings in public and semi-public areas.

POLICY UD-15. Use landscape design that is urban in character in more urban settings and use natural landscape design in more suburban settings.

POLICY UD-16. Exemplify the Pacific Northwest character through the retention of existing vegetation and through use of native plants in new landscaping. Encourage water conservation in landscape designs.

Discussion: The addition of new landscaping is important to soften the urban environment and to replace older vegetation as it dies.

POLICY UD-17. Consider the maintenance of existing and added vegetation in site design and development.



A harmonious blending of the natural and built environment determines the shape of the city (Lake Hills Greenbelt).

POLICY UD-18. Preserve significant trees and mature vegetation, with special consideration given to the protection of groups of trees and associated undergrowth, specimen trees, and evergreen trees.

Discussion: Large trees can enhance the built environment when they frame streets, border parks and adjacent buildings, or become landmarks.

POLICY UD-19. Preserve trees as a component of the skyline to retain the image of a “City in a Park.”

Open Space

POLICY UD-20. Preserve and encourage open space as a dominant element of the community’s character.

POLICY UD-21. Encourage major development to integrate public and semi-public open spaces. (See Public Places and Connections section.)

Discussion: Ensure that residents, employees, and visitors can enjoy a wide variety of open spaces throughout the community.



A range of uses can occur in public and semi-public open spaces.

POLICY UD-22. Foster and value private open space as a contribution to the visual character of the community.

Discussion: Types of open space can range from the purely visual in nature such as a stand of trees on a hillside, to very sophisticated settings for urban activities such as a carefully designed plaza for an office building.

POLICY UD-23. Preserve and enhance views of water, mountains, skylines, or other unique landmarks from public places as valuable civic assets.

POLICY UD-24. Take aggressive steps to protect waterfronts and make them accessible to the public so that they continue to give Bellevue an image of a city surrounded by natural beauty.

Signage and Wayfinding

POLICY UD-25. Assure that sign design and placement is compatible with building architecture.

POLICY UD-26. Ensure compatible signs in commercial development with multiple businesses.

POLICY UD-27. Ensure that signs are compatible with their surroundings. Signs should provide information and make a positive visual contribution to the character of the community.

POLICY UD-28. Develop a public signage and wayfinding system throughout the city that reinforces the identity of Bellevue and its distinct neighborhoods.

Public Places and Connections

The best public places appeal to the broadest number of people: young and old, residents and visitors, workers and shoppers, agile and handicapped. Public places should draw people because they are comfortable and attractive. Public art and cultural activities can draw people together and express the diversity of a community's character. A vital arts scene is a sign of a strong and mature community and makes places interesting.



People use public and semi-public spaces for leisure and formal activities, to meet, or just as a pleasant place to pass through. (Bellevue Galleria).

Attracting people into the public realm means supporting them with better transit and safer street crossings, sidewalks, walkways, bicycle routes, and trails as important connections between different places in the city. Street corridors tie different parts of Bellevue together and should instill public pride through design. The three freeways which cross Bellevue are major corridors that help shape the city's image and should be designed to be more attractive, to soften the visual impact and to enhance Bellevue's image. Topics addressed in this section are: Public Places; Public Art and Cultural Activities; Sidewalks, Walkways, and Trails; Street Corridors; Transit Facilities; and Freeways.

POLICIES

Public Places

POLICY UD-29. Provide a system of public places of various sizes and types throughout the community.

Discussion: Because of their potential widespread use, public places should offer a variety of experiences and accommodations.

POLICY UD-30. Ensure public places give access to sunlight, a sense of security, seating, landscaping, accessibility, and connections to surrounding uses and activities.

Discussion: Much like public living rooms, public spaces deserve special attention with respect to materials, furnishings, art, lighting, floor covering, and color.

POLICY UD-31. Consider the edges of public places that abut residential property for special design treatment that creates a buffer effect, but does not interfere with security or visual access.



Partially enclosed community structures can provide year-round use.

POLICY UD-32. Ensure access to sunlight in public places by avoiding building shadows during periods of the year and times of the day when outdoor activity is most prevalent.

POLICY UD-33. Incorporate pavilions in major public places that provide protection from inclement weather. While total enclosure is generally discouraged, some enclosure may be necessary.

POLICY UD-34. Identify and maintain prime views from public places through regulations and standards.

Public Art and Cultural Activities

POLICY UD-35. Support a variety of artwork and arts activities in public places, such as parks, public buildings, and plazas.

Discussion: Public Art such as sculptures, murals, reliefs, and art objects can transform the character of a place from the ordinary to the special. Public art may embellish a site, evoke emotion, create a memorable place, acknowledge community history, or be abstract and symbolic. Large or small, art pieces can stimulate the imagination and encourage people to explore them.



Major art pieces can mark district and community gateways.

POLICY UD-36. Encourage development, display, and performance opportunities for a wide range of artistic expression throughout the city.

POLICY UD-37. Expand the city's public art collection; involve the community in selection of new major items; and encourage partnerships with other arts organizations and private enterprise in city artistic activities.

Sidewalks, Walkways, and Trails

POLICY UD-38. Ensure continuous and ample sidewalks along principal, minor, and collector arterials which are integrated with abutting land uses.

Discussion: Sidewalk design may include separation from streets, connections to walkway and trail systems, landscaping, and other pedestrian amenities that enhance the community and improve pedestrian comfort.

POLICY UD-39. Include clear and ample walkways from street sidewalks and parking areas to building entrances and within and between developments as a part of site design.

POLICY UD-40. Ensure that sidewalks, walkways, and trails are furnished, where needed and appropriate, with lighting, seating, landscaping, street trees, trash

receptacles, public art, bike racks, railings, handicap access, newspaper boxes, etc. without interfering with pedestrian circulation.

Discussion: Sidewalks, walkways, and trails should not be merely functional strips of pavement. In some cases, special decorative paving, special lighting, and comfortable seating should be installed. Street trees and parked cars can serve to provide a subtle separation and a sense of safety from moving vehicles. Crosswalks in certain places could be paved with distinctive materials to highlight the pedestrian system.

Street Corridors

POLICY UD-41. Design vehicular and pedestrian routes to be visually appealing connections between different parts of Bellevue.



Art may be incorporated into streetscape features such as sound walls.

POLICY UD-42. Design boulevards to be distinctive from other streets and to reinforce the image of Bellevue as a “city in a park.” Both within the right-of-way and on adjacent private development, utilize features such as gateways, street trees, median plantings, special lighting, separated and wider sidewalks, crosswalks, seating, special signs, street names, landscaping, decorative paving patterns, and public art. (See Figure UD.1)

Discussion: These features may be achieved through a combination of public improvements in the right-of-way and private improvements consistent with city design guidelines

POLICY UD-43. Provide clear and identifiable circulation systems into and through Bellevue’s large commercial blocks to improve pedestrian activity.

Discussion: A combination of aligned building facades, passageways, covered walkways, consolidated parking areas, signs, markings, special paving, and other methods can be used.

POLICY UD-44. Encourage special streetscape design for designated intersections that create entry points into the city or neighborhoods or that warrant enhanced pedestrian features. (See Figure UD.1)

Discussion: Design features could include wider sidewalks, special signs, colorful planting, seating, improved lighting, prominent crosswalks, decorative paving patterns, and public art. Incorporate gateway treatments at designated intersections that are key entry points into the city and into smaller districts and communities within the city. Design of these intersections should take into account potential visual and physical obstructions such as mechanical equipment.

POLICY UD-45. Establish attractive gateways at all key entry points into the city and into smaller districts and communities within the city.



Discussion: Study the concept of gateways to recommend various design treatments and locations at key entry points into the city and its neighborhoods. A gateway can be dramatic

Special design features at key intersections help enhance the public realm.

and obvious, sometimes including non-commercial signs, art, structures, and unique lighting in commercial areas. It can also be quiet and more subtle, using signs, a change in plant material or paving surface in residential areas.

POLICY UD-46. Incorporate dramatic and imaginative landscape and art features when reconstructing streets and/or sidewalks at key gateways.

Transit Facilities

POLICY UD-47. Work closely and cooperatively with the regional transit provider in the planning and design of any transit facility to ensure that the design of the facilities reflect the general character of Bellevue and the surrounding neighborhoods.

Discussion: As the transit system expands and develops, it is imperative that it makes a positive contribution to the appearance of the community. Transit facilities should enhance their surroundings, with special attention given to planting, structural design, street furnishings, signs, and its connection to adjacent development.

POLICY UD-48. Encourage site and building designs that support and connect with existing or planned transit facilities in the vicinity.

Cross Reference: See Transportation Element for suggestions for transit-supportive and pedestrian-friendly design features.

POLICY UD-49. Design and coordinate the proximity of bike racks, wheelchair access, pedestrian amenities, and other modes of transportation with transit facilities.

Freeways

POLICY UD-50. Work with the state to achieve high quality design on new freeway projects, with special consideration for both views from the freeways and views of the freeways.

Discussion: The city should work with the state and federal governments to see that appropriate alignments, landscaping materials, and lighting enhance the community's image. Places where on/off ramps connect with city streets should receive particular attention.

POLICY UD-51. Encourage dense plantings, hedges, or large, fast-growing trees to act as visual screens at locations where existing views of or from freeways are unappealing.

Discussion: The city should encourage the design of these "linear gateways" to improve the image of Bellevue and soften the visual impact of the freeways equitably throughout the city.

POLICY UD-52. Ensure that all development abutting the freeway corridors includes special design features which provide an attractive entrance to the city and presents the city in an attractive manner.

Discussion: Special design features include closely-planted, large plantings; unobtrusive signs; shielded lighting; and terraced building mass. Vegetation and architectural forms should be the predominant image from the freeway. Color is encouraged as an accent, but not a dominant characteristic.

POLICY UD-53. Integrate into the designs of frontage roads along the I-90 freeway corridor the Mountain-to-Sound greenway concept. Give particular attention to multi-use trails, large scale landscaping, and pedestrian amenities.

Community Design

Bellevue is comprised of a number of neighborhoods that contain residences with schools, parks and other public facilities, and commercial and public centers which provide a variety of retail and service activity. Public centers typically include college, government, and hospital services. Urban design policies can maintain and strengthen the more private and insular qualities of residential areas while encouraging the commercial and public centers to attract people and to provide services to nearby residents.



Landscaping and signs are incorporated into commercial and public centers so that they are compatible with surrounding areas (Crossroads).

For residential neighborhoods to co-exist with commercial development, it is important to soften transitions between these two general land uses and promote better neighborhood services in adjacent commercial areas. By refining the development in these neighborhoods and improving how they function and appear, property owners and the public can feel more assured about their community's future while enhancing its desirability and cohesiveness. Topics addressed in this chapter are: Commercial and Public Centers, Residential, and Downtown.

POLICIES

Commercial and Public Centers

POLICY UD-54. Give identity and continuity to street corridors by using a comprehensive street tree plan and other landscaping to enhance circulation routes, soften the appearance of pavement and separate pedestrians from traffic.

POLICY UD-55. Incorporate architectural character, landscaping,



Commercial centers should incorporate architectural character, landscaping, and signage in a cohesive manner.

and signs into commercial and public centers that make them appear and function cohesively.

POLICY UD-56. Ensure that perimeter areas of major commercial and public centers use appropriate planting, lighting, and signs to blend with surrounding development and to be compatible with surrounding residential neighborhoods.

POLICY UD-57. Allow buildings to be sited at or near the public sidewalk as long as the full sidewalk potential is not diminished.

POLICY UD-58. Allow buildings on adjacent but separate properties to have common walls.

POLICY UD-59. Assure that more intense development is compatible with adjacent, less intense development by incorporating elements in site and building design that soften the impact from commercial to residential areas or from multifamily to single-family areas.

Residential

POLICY UD-60. Incorporate entry designs to residential neighborhoods such as low profile, identification signs, and landscaping which is in character with the neighborhood.

POLICY UD-61. Encourage the green and wooded character of existing neighborhoods.

POLICY UD-62. Minimize the removal of existing vegetation when improving streets to preserve the natural character of neighborhoods.

POLICY UD-63. Maintain vegetation along major neighborhood arterials.

POLICY UD-64. Design collector arterials that go through residential neighborhoods to reduce traffic impacts and to support the existing residential character.

POLICY UD-65. Clear and trim vegetation selectively when developing land to enhance views of prominent landforms and panoramas and soften views of commercial development.

POLICY UD-66. Enhance the appearance of neighborhoods, especially those which are older, with targeted city programs and services, such as landscaping and maintenance along the public right-of-way, sidewalk enhancements, identity treatments, and other actions that may enhance neighborhood appearance.

Downtown

The Downtown is a more intensely developed urban community with higher density, regional attraction, more detailed design requirements, and more civic functions than other parts of Bellevue.

POLICY UD-67. Enhance the appearance, image, and design character of the Downtown to be an inspiring place to live, shop, play, and work.

POLICY UD-68. Encourage rooflines which create interesting and distinctive forms against the sky within the Downtown.

POLICY UD-69. Develop a functional and attractive Downtown which is harmonious with adjacent neighborhoods by considering the impacts of through-traffic, views, building scale, and land use.

POLICY UD-70. Use landscaping or greenspace to mitigate the potential impacts on surrounding neighborhoods.

POLICY UD-71. Permit high intensity residential development subject to design criteria which assures a livable urban environment.

POLICY UD-72. Link the increased intensity of development with the increased pedestrian amenities, pedestrian-oriented building design, midblock connections, public spaces, activities, openness, sunlight, and view preservation.

POLICY UD-73. Create a pedestrian environment with a sense of activity and protection.

POLICY UD-74. Discourage signs at upper levels of high-rise buildings with limited exception for hotel names and logos when compatible with the building's architecture.

POLICY UD-75. Use urban design features to soften the public right-of-way and sidewalk environment as appropriate. These features include, but are not limited to, street trees, landscaping, water features, raised planter boxes, potted plantings, pedestrian-scaled lighting, street furniture, paving treatments, medians, and the separation of pedestrians from traffic.



Downtown is shaped by design guidelines that enhance the area's livability and character.

Landmarks and Historic Resources

History is a major aspect of Bellevue which gives it depth, diversity, and uniqueness. Different parts of the city have their own individual mixture of past events, people, buildings, and celebrations. Most people are familiar with historic buildings and districts, but in Bellevue there are also other places which are reminders of the past. For example: the railroad trestle over SE 8th Street; historic coal mines south of I-90; the plants, wildlife, and agriculture of Mercer Slough; unique large trees; and a number of outstanding private gardens should be recognized for their long-standing contribution to the community. The city should acknowledge the existence of Native American and Asian cultures in Bellevue's past.



Historical buildings and landmarks are important reminders of Bellevue's unique past (Winters House - Built in 1928).

A number of structures and sites from the early 1900s exist today. The city can enrich the lives of its citizens and its appeal to visitors by commemorating its past. In some cases, this may mean active involvement in the preservation and renovation of historic landmarks; in others, historical interpretation may be sufficient. Policies which provide direction for preservation and commemoration enable us to retain an important link with previous generations. Preserving historic resources can help retain community values, provide for continuity over time, and contribute to a sense of place within the region.

POLICIES

POLICY UD-76. Preserve, enhance and interpret Bellevue's historical identity.

Discussion: Complete and maintain a comprehensive record of historic resources (including buildings, artifacts, and sites) and make available to individuals and community organizations.

POLICY UD-77. Recognize the heritage of the community by naming (or re-naming) parks, streets, and other public places after major figures and events.

POLICY UD-78. Designate historic landmark sites and structures and review proposed changes to ensure that these sites and structures will continue to be a part of the community and explore incentives for rehabilitation.

POLICY UD-79. Identify vista points and landmarks such as major trees, buildings and landforms to preserve as Bellevue develops.

Additional Resources

Land Use Code

Pedestrian Corridor and Major Public Open Space - Design Guidelines

Building/Sidewalk Relationships - Design Guidelines

Functional plans

Pedestrian and Bicycle Transportation Plan (1999)

Transit Plan (2005)

Subarea Plans

Capital Investment Program (CIP)

Public Art Plan (1994)

Cultural Compass (2004)

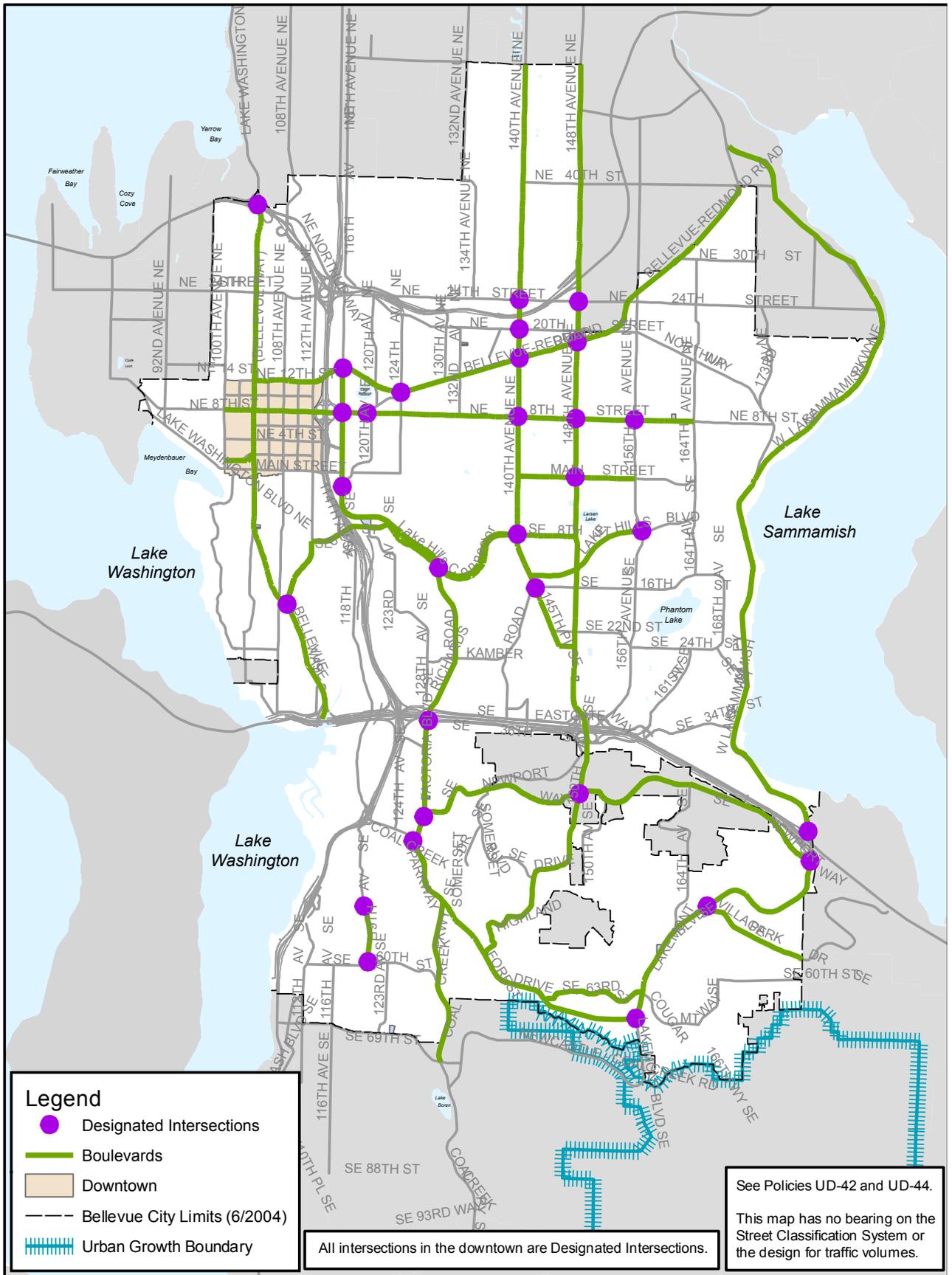


FIGURE UD.1
Urban Design Treatment
For Boulevards and Designated Intersections



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