



# CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

## WHAT YOU WILL FIND IN THIS CHAPTER

- ▶ Discussion of Bellevue's past, present, and future methods of involving the public in the planning process.
- ▶ Policies to guide the city's public outreach to ensure citizens have an active role in planning for and shaping Bellevue's future.

## CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT VISION

**BELLEVUE'S ACTIVELY ENGAGED CITIZENRY SHAPES THE CITY'S FUTURE.**

***Bellevue has a strong social fabric, where community groups, businesses and the city organization work together to address our needs. The city makes citizen engagement a high priority, and residents know that their local government listens and responds to them. Bellevue's residents care about the city and work collectively to address mutual needs.***

*The policies of this draft element have been reviewed and edited by the Bellevue Planning Commission. The Commission may further modify its recommendations following public review of the draft document. The plan narrative in this draft was written by staff and has not yet been reviewed by the Planning Commission. The narrative does not have the effect of setting policy direction, but rather provides context and background for each element of the Comprehensive Plan.*

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## INTRODUCTION

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The Bellevue community is engaged in a wide array of civic activities: helping at the Botanic Garden; serving on boards, commissions, and community advisory committees; participating in police ride share programs; volunteering as neighborhood mediators; among others! City staff strive to learn about its citizens' preferences through surveys, open houses, and public hearings. Staff value public input, incorporating citizens' ideas into plans and budgets. Bellevue's high level of citizen engagement ensures that city government is transparent, accessible, and responsive.

## TODAY'S CONDITIONS AND TOMORROW'S PROJECTIONS

### CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT TODAY AND TOMORROW

Bellevue has a long tradition of engaging citizens in planning the future of their city. Bellevue's Comprehensive Plan has evolved with extensive and continuous community involvement. The plan affects the entire city, however the major impacts of development allowed by the plan are more significant to residents in the immediate vicinity. The city also regularly invites citizen participation in more specific planning efforts such as participation in citizen advisory committees, open houses, focus groups, surveys, and other methods.

The tradition of active engagement requires the city to innovate and evolve in how it engages its citizens. Demographic changes, especially increasing diversity, require the city to develop new approaches to citizen engagement to ensure broad participation by Bellevue's residents. In addition, changes in communication technology allow, and even require, the city to offer new avenues for engagement. Finally, changes to the built environment and the city's infrastructure are constantly evolving and continually require citizen input.

### OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

#### *Citizen Engagement in a Diverse Community*

Promoting citizen engagement in the diverse community of contemporary Bellevue requires a variety of approaches and strategies. City staff seeks to engage all Bellevue residents in civic life and cannot assume that all members of the Bellevue community are equally comfortable or familiar with activities such as volunteering with city programs or participating in public meetings. Some immigrant communities may harbor a higher level of suspicion of government based on prior experience. Further,

### WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

- ▶ As a civic organization, Bellevue needs to continually listen to the public. As the community and the nature of communication change, the city will need to evaluate its outreach methods and look for new opportunities.
- ▶ Public opinion is important in developing plans, budgets, and projects. The community is actively engaged in the decisions that shape Bellevue's future.

residents with limited English may be reluctant to participate in city events, and communication between members of different cultural groups can suffer from misunderstandings due to mistaken assumptions and different culturally based expectations.

The city can take steps to better engage our diverse community in civic life. City staff can develop skills to communicate more effectively with members of diverse cultures. City staff can also develop outreach programs designed to connect to our diverse communities by holding meetings at locations in the neighborhoods and working to identify and mentor potential leaders from diverse communities. The city can develop and implement a policy on translation of city documents and interpretation at city meetings that result in a predictable service that is reasonable and affordable for the city.

### ***New Technologies***

For some years, Bellevue staff has been using the web and social media as avenues for citizen engagement. For younger generations social media has become the default means for interacting with organizations and individuals. Also for busy professionals, especially those with families, participating in civic issues through more traditional public engagement tools, such as public hearings or open houses, is impractical. By using internet and social media tools, the city can make participation easier, more convenient, and consistent with the expectations our citizens.

Using the web and social media is also changing how cities inform citizens—allowing instant dissemination of complex information to anyone with an Internet connection. It has also transformed interactions with citizens and how input is collected. The city now has a mobile app for smart phones, communicates with the public via Facebook and Twitter, and offers a “paperless” permit application option available entirely on line. While these changes facilitate public engagement, they also raise a variety of potential problems. For example, it is harder to verify the identity of someone sending a comment electronically, maintaining an appropriately civil discourse in on-line forums can be challenging, misunderstandings can be harder to correct than in face to face communication, there may be individuals without access to these technologies, and individual privacy concerns need to be respected.

### ***More Complex Public Projects***

Complex, challenging planning projects are on the horizon, such as development of light rail; growth of the city’s employment centers; work to address affordable housing; and programs to maintain the character of residential neighborhoods even as they continue to evolve. All of these changes require the city to engage citizens in new ways and in conversations that are very different from the conversations the city had 20 years ago. The city’s citizen engagement needs to be adept at presenting increasingly technical information. The city needs to be responsive to public concerns, be able to host public conversations where a diversity of viewpoints can be expressed, and be able to integrate diverse viewpoints into planning solutions.

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## CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT IN BELLEVUE

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### WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?

A successful plan would result in

- Broad participation of Bellevue citizens in the civic engagement opportunities that the city offers, including citizens from our many cultures.
- The city offers multiple channels of engagement, including social media and other evolving technologies.
- Public issues, even the most controversial, are discussed respectfully and thoughtfully.
- Adopted plans and policies reflect integration of the multiple public perspectives provided through these engagement processes.

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## GOALS & POLICIES

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### GOAL

To ensure that the public has on-going opportunities to participate in all planning efforts, the following policies should guide all future planning efforts.

### POLICIES

- CP-1.** Encourage and facilitate expanded public participation in all planning processes. Design user-friendly processes that inform and educate the public about the substance of issues and how they can be involved.
- CP-2.** Consider the interests of the entire community and the goals and policies of this Plan before making land use decisions. Proponents of change in land use should demonstrate that the proposed change responds to the interests and changing needs of the entire city, balanced with the interests of the neighborhoods most directly impacted by the project.
- CP-3.** Ensure that the process which identifies new commercial areas or expands existing areas considers the impacts of potential development on affected residential neighborhoods and results in decisions that are consistent with other policies in the Comprehensive Plan.
- CP-4.** Balance the interests of the commercial and residential communities when considering modifications to zoning or development regulations.
- CP-5.** Develop and maintain Land Use Code provisions that define the process and standards relevant to each stage of land use decision making, and educate the public about these processes and standards to promote meaningful citizen participation.
- CP-6.** Encourage and emphasize open communication between developers and neighbors about compatibility issues.



- CP-7.** Prepare a public involvement program that is tailored to effectively and efficiently involve the public in major revisions to the General Elements and Subarea Plans of the Comprehensive Plan. Utilize citizen advisory committees or other methods that represent a broad spectrum of viewpoints as part of the public involvement program.
- CP-X1.** Encourage community involvement through master planning of large public projects to provide a predictable review process.
- CP-8.** Use a range of public forums and opportunities including commissions, boards, and the community council to facilitate citizen participation in the planning process.
- CP-X2.** Use new and emerging technologies for citizen engagement where they are effective and efficient at enhancing citizen understanding and participation.

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## IMPLEMENTATION

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The Citizen Engagement policies affect a range of city actions and help ensure citizen involvement in planning projects, amendments of the city's Comprehensive Plan and development regulations.

The specific formal opportunities for public input in development review and the specific criteria that development projects must address are defined in the Land Use Code.