NEIGHBORHOODS

WHAT YOU WILL FIND IN THIS CHAPTER

- A description of the key issues that shape the character and quality of life in Bellevue's neighborhoods.
- Discussion of the challenges and opportunities facing Bellevue neighborhoods.
- Policies addressing issues common to all Bellevue neighborhoods.

NEIGHBORHOODS VISION

BELLEVUE IS A COMMUNITY OF DIVERSE AND VIBRANT NEIGHBORHOODS.

Bellevue residents live in a variety of distinctive, safe and attractive neighborhoods that provide amenities and opportunities for a high quality of life. The strong connections among neighbors contribute to these qualities and the ability of neighborhoods to respond to change.

INTRODUCTION

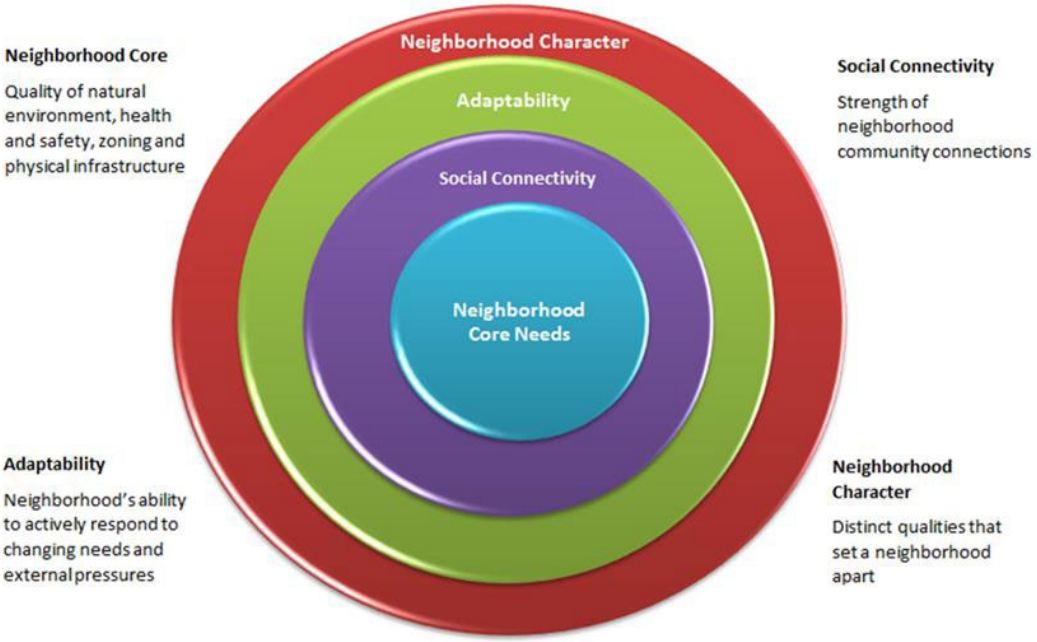
Bellevue is a city of neighborhoods, including single family and multifamily communities and the growing vertical neighborhoods of Downtown and BelRed. Each neighborhood has a rich history and community traditions while also being dynamic and responsive to the changing needs of its residents. Bellevue's 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 character of the Pacific Northwest. The city's role is to ensure that neighborhoods enjoy a high-quality environment that facilitates a safe and welcoming community, are able to adapt to changing needs, and preserve what is cherished most.

Policies to keep Bellevue's neighborhoods healthy and vital are integrated throughout the Comprehensive Plan. The Neighborhoods Element provides an additional framework to consider issues that go beyond a neighborhood's basic needs, such as responding to change and external forces. 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 HIGHLY FUNCTIONING NEIGHBORHOOD

As depicted in Figure N-1, four factors shape neighborhood quality: Neighborhood Core Needs, Social Connectivity, Adaptability and Neighborhood Character. 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. Neighborhood character is comprised of the distinct qualities and amenities that set each neighborhood apart and provide a 'sense of place.'

Figure N-1. Key Elements of a Highly Functioning 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 and welcoming community 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 the connectedness among neighbors contributes to residents' quality of life. Social connectivity determines a neighborhood's ability to resolve neighborhood disputes, prepare for emergencies, deter crime, care for elderly 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 provide 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.

Neighborhood Character

Bellevue values the distinct character and 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.

The city encourages and coordinates neighborhood participation in projects to enhance unique neighborhood character. 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 preserve and develop distinct neighborhood character across the city.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

- Bellevue has sixteen neighborhood areas, each containing several smaller neighborhoods.
- Bellevue's population is increasingly diverse.
- Most of the city's remaining residential capacity is in mixed use areas, primarily Downtown and BelRed.

TODAY'S CONDITIONS AND TOMORROW'S PROJECTIONS

NEIGHBORHOODS TODAY AND TOMORROW

Each of Bellevue's sixteen neighborhood areas is home to many smaller neighborhoods including extraordinary single family areas and strong multifamily neighborhoods. Bellevue has shown its commitment to neighborhoods by providing planning and services that have made these highly desirable places to live.

Bellevue has been successful at cultivating a vibrant urban center downtown, providing amenities that attract a thriving residential and business community. BelRed will become another dynamic, vertical neighborhood. As Bellevue continues to grow, most growth will occur in these denser mixed commercial and residential areas. This will increase density in Bellevue's core urban areas, lead to the development of new vertical neighborhoods while protecting established neighborhoods from needing to absorb this growth.

Factors that will affect the future of neighborhoods include:

- Neighborhoods want to preserve and develop their unique character, 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.
- Ninety percent of the city's future housing capacity is in Bellevue's multifamily mixed use districts.
- As Bellevue becomes denser, residents will continue to want safe, quality neighborhoods and access to schools, parks, trails, local stores and recreation.

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 residents. This includes on-going attention to residential crime prevention, emergency preparedness, public safety services, enforcement of city codes, neighborhood maintenance, the maintenance of public property and right-of-way, walkability, lighting and social cohesiveness.

Increasing Diversity

Bellevue's residents are increasingly diverse, adding layers of complexity to the community life of Bellevue's neighborhoods. This diversity provides both opportunities for residents and a challenge to engage cross-culturally in community life. Bellevue's neighborhoods need to provide places for local connection and the city needs to encourage neighborhood social cohesiveness by supporting the neighborhood associations, community clubs, faith communities, park and community services, schools, non-profits and businesses that invest in Bellevue's community.

Capacity for Problem-Solving

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

Maintaining Neighborhood Character

As Bellevue matures, the variety of expression, history and local 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 character. Success will require balancing the the needs of the whole city while avoiding a “one size fits all” approach to neighborhood planning that undermines neighborhood distinctiveness.

BELLEVUE'S PLAN FOR NEIGHBORHOODS

Strong community connections strengthen neighborhoods and directly raise the quality of life. The Neighborhood Plan provides policies to support the resiliency and capacity of neighborhoods to respond to local needs, care for one another, and develop a strong sense of community.

Neighborhoods are dynamic and will have changing internal needs, such as the desire for older adults to age in place, as well as external forces such as shifting investment patterns. The Neighborhood Plan provides policies that identify changing conditions in neighborhoods, and provide support for local community responses to meet changing needs.

Distinct neighborhood character enhances the quality of life for the entire city. Because neighborhoods have unique values, amenities, natural environments and local priorities, the Neighborhood Plan provides policies that encourage neighborhoods to preserve and develop distinct neighborhood character, engage locally on neighborhood enhancement projects, and improve communication with the city on sharing neighborhood-specific priorities, opportunities and concerns.

NEIGHBORHOOD AREA PLANNING

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

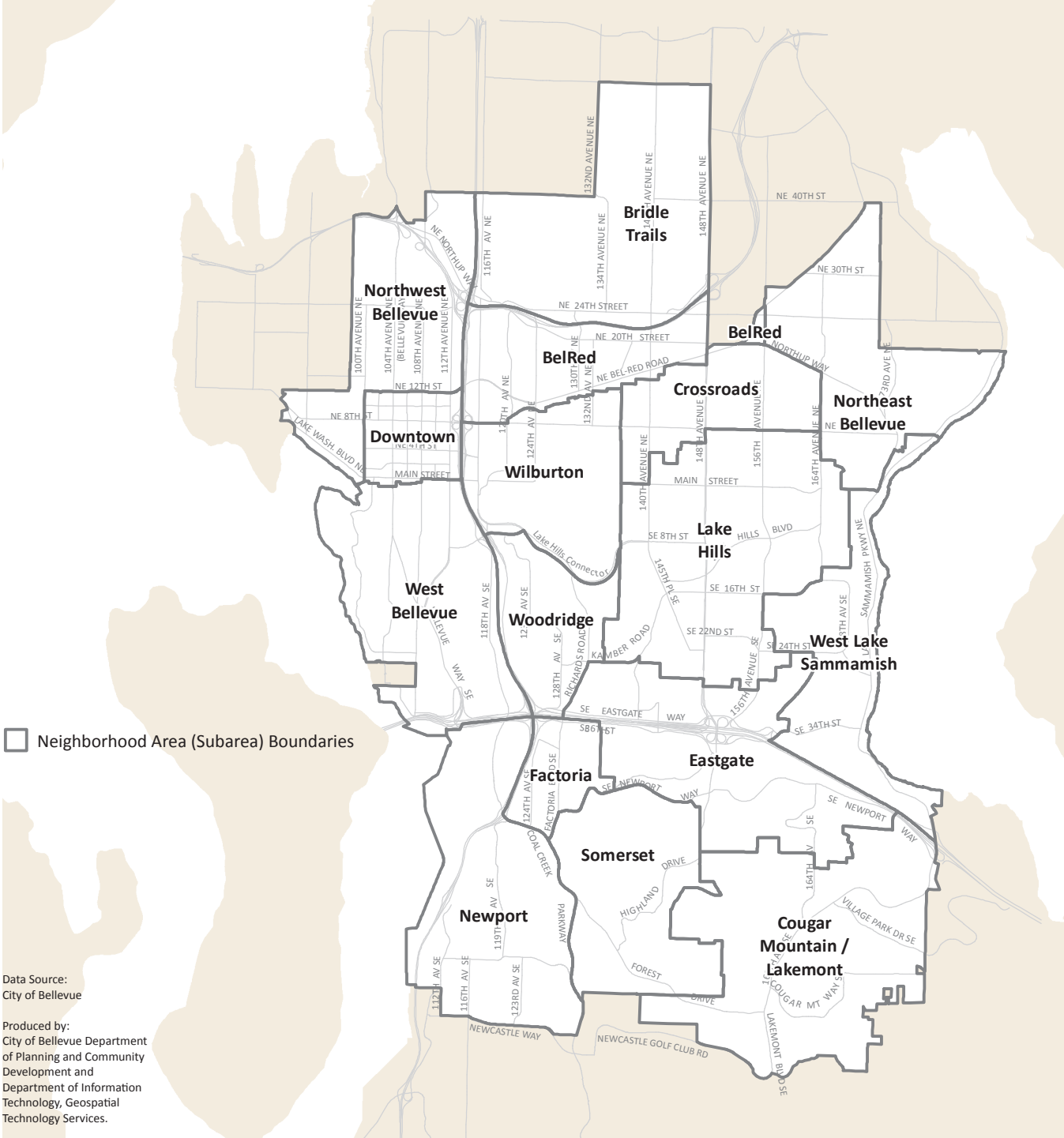
The Neighborhoods Element provides policies to periodically update the neighborhood area (subarea) plans as conditions warrant, and provides structure for policies that account for distinctive neighborhood character to develop over time. The city understands that not every neighborhood-specific concern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

WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?

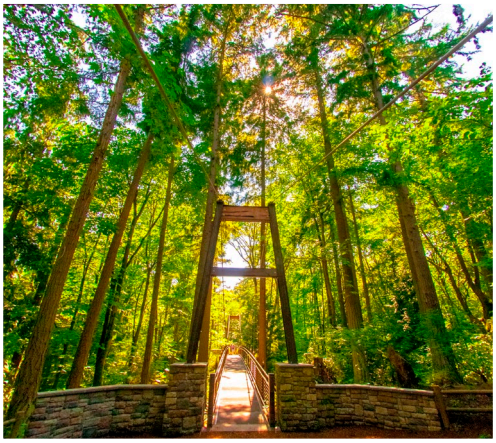
- Residents are safe and comfortable in their neighborhoods.
- Neighbors feel a sense of belonging through participation in their neighborhood and community associations, community centers, and schools.
- The city works with neighborhoods to respond to emerging concerns and changing conditions.
- New neighborhood plans reflect local values, identity, and character.

Map N-1. New Neighborhood Area (Subarea) Boundaries

Neighborhood areas define places in Bellevue where planning occurs at a finer level. Plans for neighborhood areas include specific policies addressing the unique issues of each area. These boundaries are updated to better align with community expectations. As neighborhood area plans are updated, these new boundaries will be applied.



GOALS & 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

N-1. Maintain neighborhoods as safe and welcoming environments for everyone to enjoy.

N-2. Ensure police, fire and emergency services provide high levels of public safety that respond to growth and changing community needs.

N-3. 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 and fire prevention).

N-4. Plan and prepare for the response, recovery, and mitigation of potential disasters and hazards.

Social Connectivity

N-5. Promote community connections that strengthen the social fabric of neighborhoods, including support for local neighborhood associations, community clubs, community centers, school organizations and non-profits that invest in building community.

Adaptability

N-6. Provide venues for two-way communication with residents to listen to and respond to emerging neighborhood opportunities and concerns.

N-7. Support the capacity of local neighborhood communities to actively engage and respond to changing internal neighborhood needs and external stresses.

N-8. Regularly track changes in demographics and neighborhood indicators to improve city responsiveness to changing conditions in neighborhoods.

Neighborhood Character

N-9. Preserve and develop distinctive neighborhood character within Bellevue's diverse neighborhoods.

N-10. Provide programs and support for residents 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.

N-11. Enable neighborhood-tailored solutions to localized issues while ensuring that they meet citywide responsibilities.

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

Neighborhood area plans allow for geographic areas of the city to identify issues particular to their neighborhoods that may be unique from citywide polices. There are certain issues that lend themselves to neighborhood specific approaches. Examples may include tree preservation, accommodating detached accessory dwelling units, or support for innovative housing choices. These would be appropriate to address at a neighborhood level and in neighborhood area plans, while recognizing that local approaches need to take into account citywide objectives and requirements.

Neighborhood Area Planning

N-12. Periodically assess and update neighborhood area plans and adapt plans to changing conditions.

N-13. 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.

N-14. Use the neighborhood area planning process to engage local communities to define neighborhood area specific values and policies.

N-15. Ensure Neighborhood area plans and policies are consistent with the other policies of the Comprehensive Plan.

POLICY CONNECTIONS

Neighborhood issues are often citywide issues that are addressed throughout other elements of the Comprehensive Plan. In addition to policies focused on neighborhoods included in this chapter, neighborhoods are recognized in other parts of the plan.

The **Citizen Engagement** Element includes policies on engaging community input in land use decisions.

The **Land Use** Element includes policies about residential and neighborhood commercial uses, open space, land use regulations, and support of neighborhood shopping centers.

The **Housing** Element includes policies about housing quality, options, and affordability.

The **Parks, Recreation and Open Space** Element includes policies on the distribution of parks and recreation opportunities throughout the city, including neighborhood facilities and community centers.

The **Transportation** Element includes polices about connectivity within and among neighborhoods, and discouraging cut-through traffic.

The **Economic** Development Element includes policies about the economic health of shopping centers and the quality of life of Bellevue neighborhoods. It also includes policies supporting schools and education.

The **Urban Design** and the Arts Element includes policies on urban design that establish a baseline for design quality in public spaces and residential areas.

IMPLEMENTATION

Bellevue implements the Comprehensive Plan through numerous actions, including day-to-day operations, capital investments, strategic partnerships, and review of new development projects. The following list shows some of the relevant plans that implement the Neighborhoods Element.

Implementation	Type
Neighborhood Area Plans Neighborhood area plans are an opportunity to look at planning issues at a neighborhood scale.	**Subarea Plans:** updated periodically.
Neighborhood Outreach Program The Neighborhood Outreach Program increases neighborhoods' capacity for problem-solving, and provides opportunities for public engagement.	**Program:** on-going.
Neighborhood Enhancement Program A program that engages neighborhood leadership, and funds community directed investments for neighborhood improvements.	**Program:** on-going.
Land Use Code Work Program The Land Use Code work program includes initiatives that could help in the revitalization of neighborhood commercial centers such as demonstration projects, land use code changes, and land use incentives.	**Land Use Code:** updates conducted annually.