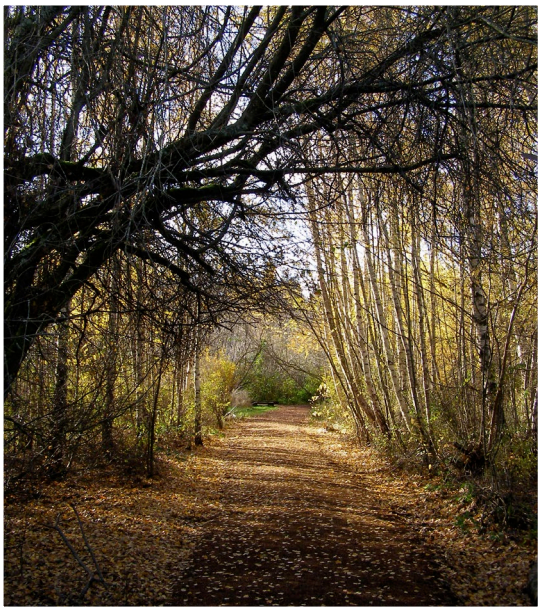


Credit: Kellie Rogers

PARKS, RECREATION, AND OPEN SPACE

WHAT YOU WILL FIND IN THIS CHAPTER

- Information about parks, open space, and community services in Bellevue, including current conditions, future projections, and opportunities and challenges.
- A description of the city's plan for meeting the recreation needs of its residents, including specific focus areas for service.
- Goals and policies that meet the city's vision for Parks & Community Services.

PARKS, RECREATION, AND OPEN SPACE VISION

BELLEVUE IS A "CITY IN A PARK."

Bellevue has a system of parks, open spaces, cultural facilities, and recreational amenities throughout the city. These provide abundant access to natural beauty and extraordinary experiences to define a lifetime of recreation and learning.

INTRODUCTION

Bellevue's natural environment has long been central to the quality of life it offers. The city lies between Lake Washington and Lake Sammamish, touching the foothills of the Cascade Mountains. Within the city are hundreds of acres of urban forests, wetlands, and streams that support wildlife. Recognizing this unique natural setting, the City has long branded itself a "City in a Park."

The Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Element contains policies that guide the acquisition, development, and operation of Bellevue's parks and open space system. It also sets policies for recreation programs and the provision of community services. Bellevue's parks and open space system policies focus on linking existing components of the parks system, providing new recreation opportunities, and protecting environmentally sensitive areas. The Recreation and Community Services policies recognize that use of the park system is maximized by offering a wide variety of education, recreation and social opportunities for all members of the community. Policies focused on stewardship reflect the community's value in preserving and protecting natural resources. Finally, policies directed at park maintenance, renovation, and redevelopment support Bellevue's long-standing tradition of providing impeccably maintained and high-functioning parks, trails and open space.

TODAY'S CONDITIONS AND TOMORROW'S PROJECTIONS

PARKS, RECREATION, AND OPEN SPACE TODAY AND TOMORROW

Today's Conditions

On average, over 35,000 people a year participate in Bellevue recreation programs through community centers, programs for older adults, teen services, the Bellevue Youth Theatre, youth sports, skate parks, day camps, and other events and programs. In addition, approximately 5,900 people volunteer annually to support a wide variety of programs and services offered by Bellevue Parks & Community Services.

Hundreds of thousands of Bellevue residents, workers, and visitors regularly use the parks and open space system, which encompasses over 2,500 acres. When surveyed, 94% of Bellevue residents report using one or more park facilities at least twice a year. According to surveys, the most frequently visited facilities each year are the 650 acres of open space and gardens for unstructured play and picnicking, the 45 playgrounds, the seven beach parks, and the 85 miles of trails through forests, wetlands and other natural areas.

Parks & Community Services manages community and visitor centers located across the city as well as athletic fields and courts supporting organized outdoor sports such as soccer, football, lacrosse, basketball, cricket, baseball, golf, and tennis. The parks system also includes an aquatic center, three community farms, community garden plots, and off-leash dog facilities.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

- Nearly all of Bellevue's residents use parks, open space, facilities, and recreational programs in the city's park system.
- Bellevue will continue to develop as a diverse city, both in population and physical form.
- The city aspires to provide walkable access to parks and trails for all Bellevue residents.
- While Bellevue residents support new park land and natural areas, there are constraints on land acquisition, as land for parks becomes scarcer and more expensive.
- Bellevue will focus on pursuing a coordinated system of greenways to create access and connections between parks, recreation, and open space areas.

Tomorrow's Projections

Several factors will impact the future of the parks, recreation, and open space system in Bellevue. Bellevue has become and will continue to develop as a diverse city. Diversity is found in in the city's resident and workforce population in dimensions of age, physical ability, and race and ethnicity. Diversity is also found in the types and styles of neighborhoods; Bellevue has everything from five-acre estates to small, high-rise apartments.

The increasing diversity of park users, including a growing population of older adults, will affect the type of services and recreation offered in the future. Older adults will need recreation facilities and programs that cater to their specific needs, and growing ethnic and cultural diversity creates opportunities to provide a wider variety of sports, arts, and cultural events to all Bellevue residents.

Because Bellevue is an attractive place for commercial and residential development, there are competing demands for the fixed supply of land within the city. Areas like Downtown Bellevue, which is the city's financial and business hub, are under particular pressure to provide parks and quality outdoor space for a large number of people in a relatively constrained area. Therefore, as commercial and residential development continues to occur, land for parks and open space becomes scarcer and more expensive with each passing year. Careful parks planning and requisition strategies will be necessary to ensure that all areas of the city have equitable access to quality recreation opportunities.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Population Density

Population density is becoming less uniform in Bellevue's neighborhoods. Downtown Bellevue and a redeveloped BelRed offer the opportunity for an increasingly high-density urban lifestyle preferred by many residents. At the same time, Bellevue still maintains low-density single family neighborhoods, as well as pockets of medium-density apartment complexes. A variety of parks and recreation facilities and services are needed to serve all these styles of neighborhoods. Once developed, they will add complexity and richness to the overall system.

Regional Partnerships

The city uses its parks and open space system as a tool to steward the natural environment. As a key strategy of this effort, the city is actively pursuing a coordinated system of greenways that provide multiple benefits and functions for residents of the community. Greenways provide important non-motorized linkages between neighborhoods, schools, parks and activity areas. Examples of major greenway initiatives are the Eastside Rail Corridor and the Mountains to Sound Greenway. The City has the opportunity to work with regional partners to design a new separated, non-motorized trail facility extending the entire length of the city from north to south in the case of the Eastside Rail Corridor and east to west along the I-90 corridor with the Mountains to Sound Greenway.

WHAT ARE GREENWAYS?

Greenways are natural areas and greenbelts that provide open space within developed areas. Greenways function to meet passive and active recreation needs of the community, protect wildlife and critical habitat areas, and provide linkages between parks and commercial or residential neighborhoods.

Unserved Areas

While Bellevue's park system is generally well-distributed throughout the community, there remain several areas of the city that are less served by parks and trails than other areas. For example, the Eastgate area south of I-90, added in the most recent annexation to the city, included no park facilities at the time of annexation.

Rising Land Costs

Surveys show Bellevue residents believe the city should continue to invest in acquisition of new park land and natural areas. However, the high cost of land across the city, particularly in Downtown, and the scarcity of large tracts of undeveloped land, point to a future of smaller, targeted acquisitions.

BELLEVUE'S PARKS, RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE PLAN

Seven focus areas are used to plan for park, recreation, and open space needs in Bellevue. These focus areas have generally remained consistent since 1987, although over time they have been restructured and modified to meet contemporary needs.

- **Open Space, Greenways, Wildlife Corridors, and Trails:** Acquiring and protecting open space to establish a network of greenways throughout the community.
- **Park Facilities:** Providing walkable access to neighborhood and community parks through acquisition, development, or redevelopment.
- **Active Recreation Facilities:** Siting community centers and active recreation facilities throughout the community to provide indoor and outdoor recreation spaces and activities to a wide spectrum of users.
- **Urban Park Systems:** Facing unique challenges in designing and providing a park system to serve the urban densities of Downtown Bellevue and a redeveloped BelRed.
- **Waterfront Access:** Acquiring and developing additional publicly-owned waterfront property to meet community interest.
- **Partnership Opportunities:** Relying on community partners in the public, private and non-profit sectors to provide recreation and community service needs for Bellevue residents.
- **Historic, Cultural, and Art Resources:** Protecting and interpreting Bellevue's cultural history as well as providing space and an outlet for artistic expression.

THE VALUE OF WILDLIFE CORRIDORS:

Wildlife corridors, composed primarily of native vegetation, join two or more larger areas of similar wildlife habitat. Corridors are critical for the maintenance of ecological processes, including allowing for the movement of animals and the continuation of viable populations on increasingly more constrained urban lands.

Analysis and long-range capital projects to support these focus areas are included in the Parks & Open Space System Plan.

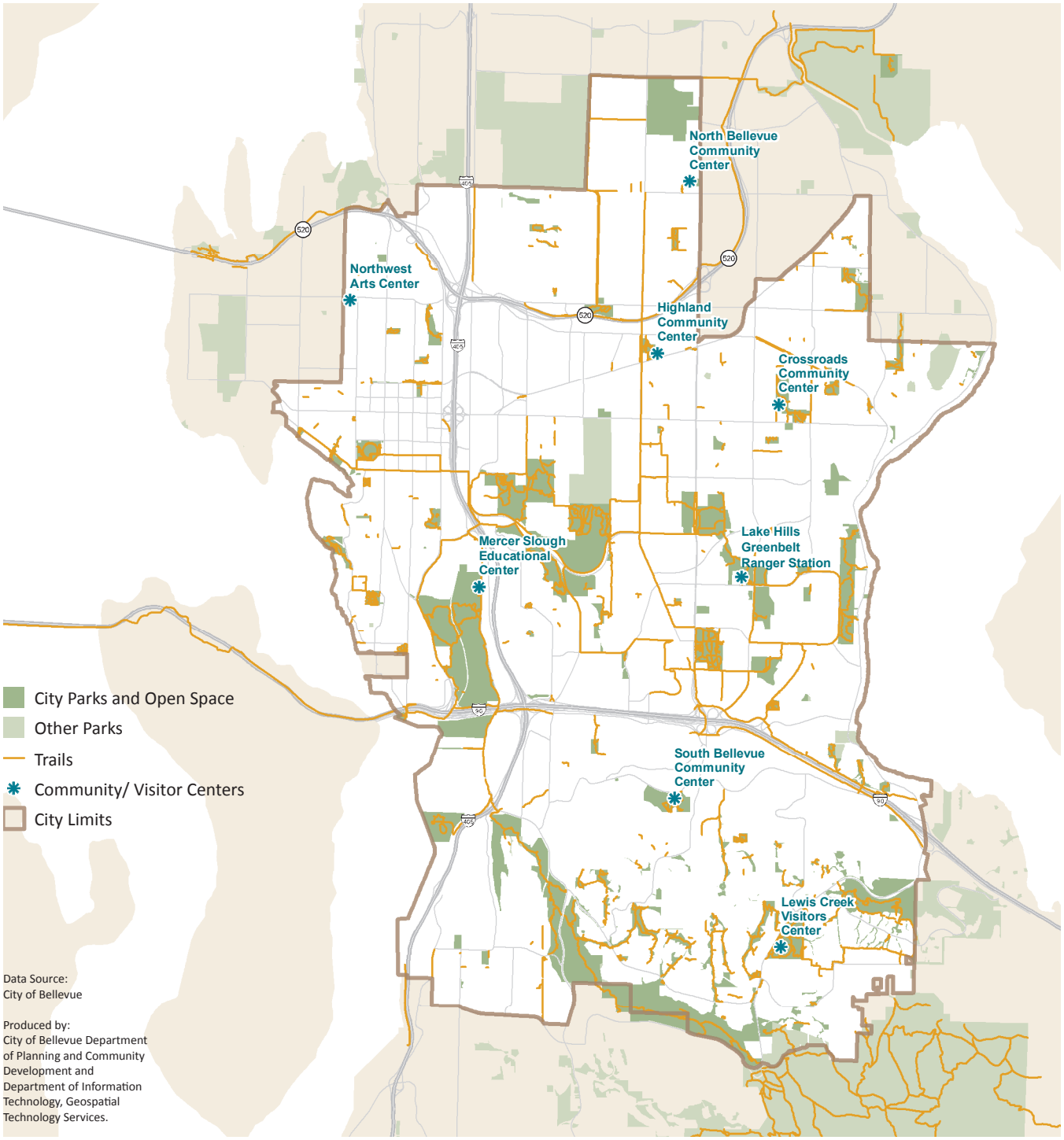
The city's Recreation Program Plan contains objectives and an implementation strategy to guide the city's role as a recreation service provider and ensure that all residents enjoy the benefits of recreation. The plan places special emphasis on meeting the needs of teens, youth, older adults, persons with disabilities, and those with limited opportunities for recreation, and is designed to deliver programs using a collective impact service model in partnership with other recreation service providers. Ultimately, the Recreation Program Plan builds a healthy community and promotes the full utilization of the city's recreation and park facilities.

WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?

The City has performance measures and service indicators for parks, recreation, and open space. These measures are reported to the public in an annual performance scorecard report. Examples of measures include public satisfaction with the condition of park and recreation facilities, the number of individuals taking part in recreation programs and events, and the percentage of households living within 1/3 mile of a park or trail access point.

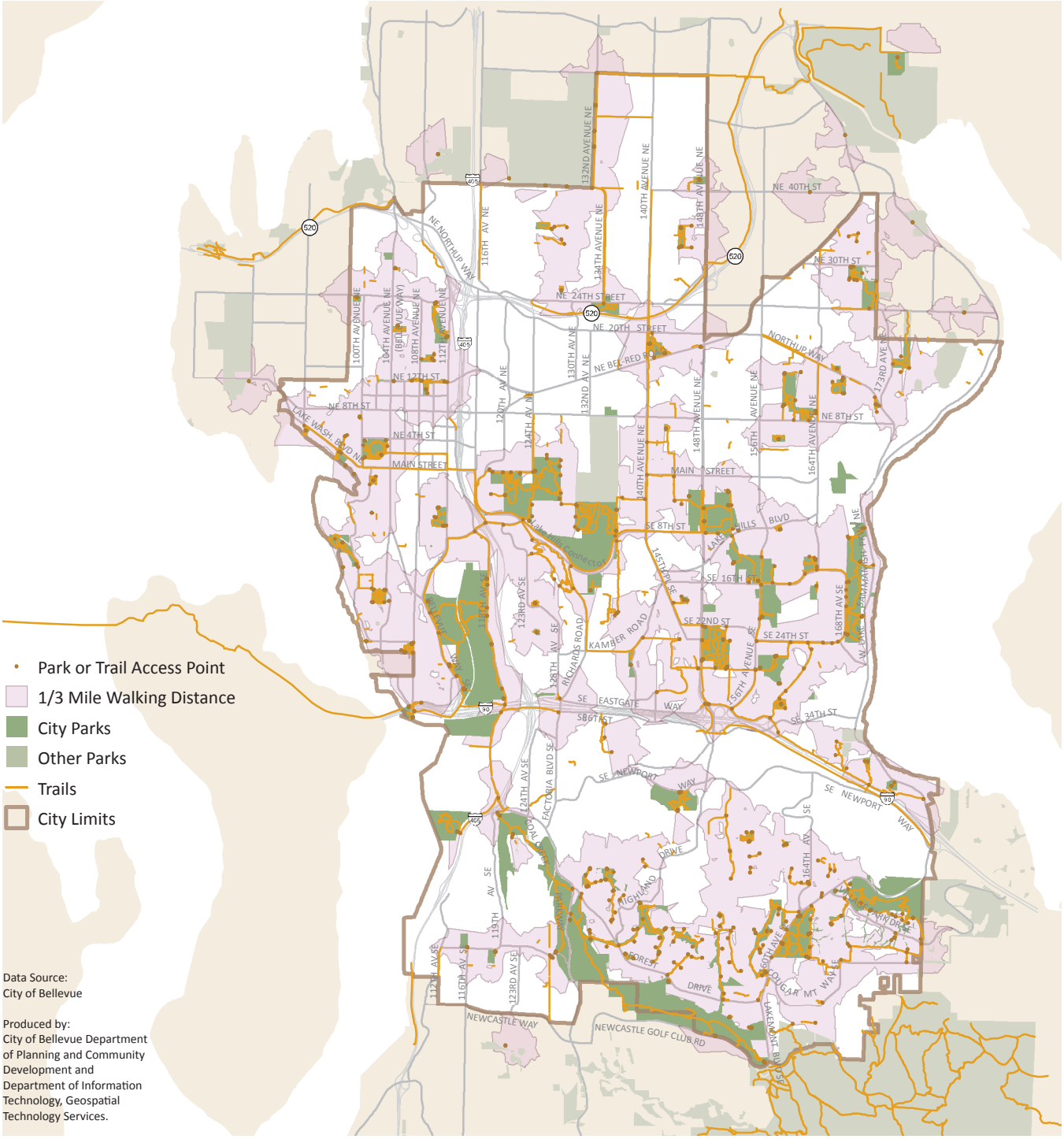
Map PA-1. Parks, Open Space, Community Centers and Trails

This map shows parks, trails, visitor and community centers and open space within Bellevue along with other parks and open space that are owned and managed by other public agencies or privately held.



Map PA-2. Park Access

This map shows areas of the city that are within a 1/3 of a mile walk of a public park or trail access point. Bellevue has a goal to increase the number of parks and trails within walking distance of all Bellevue residents.

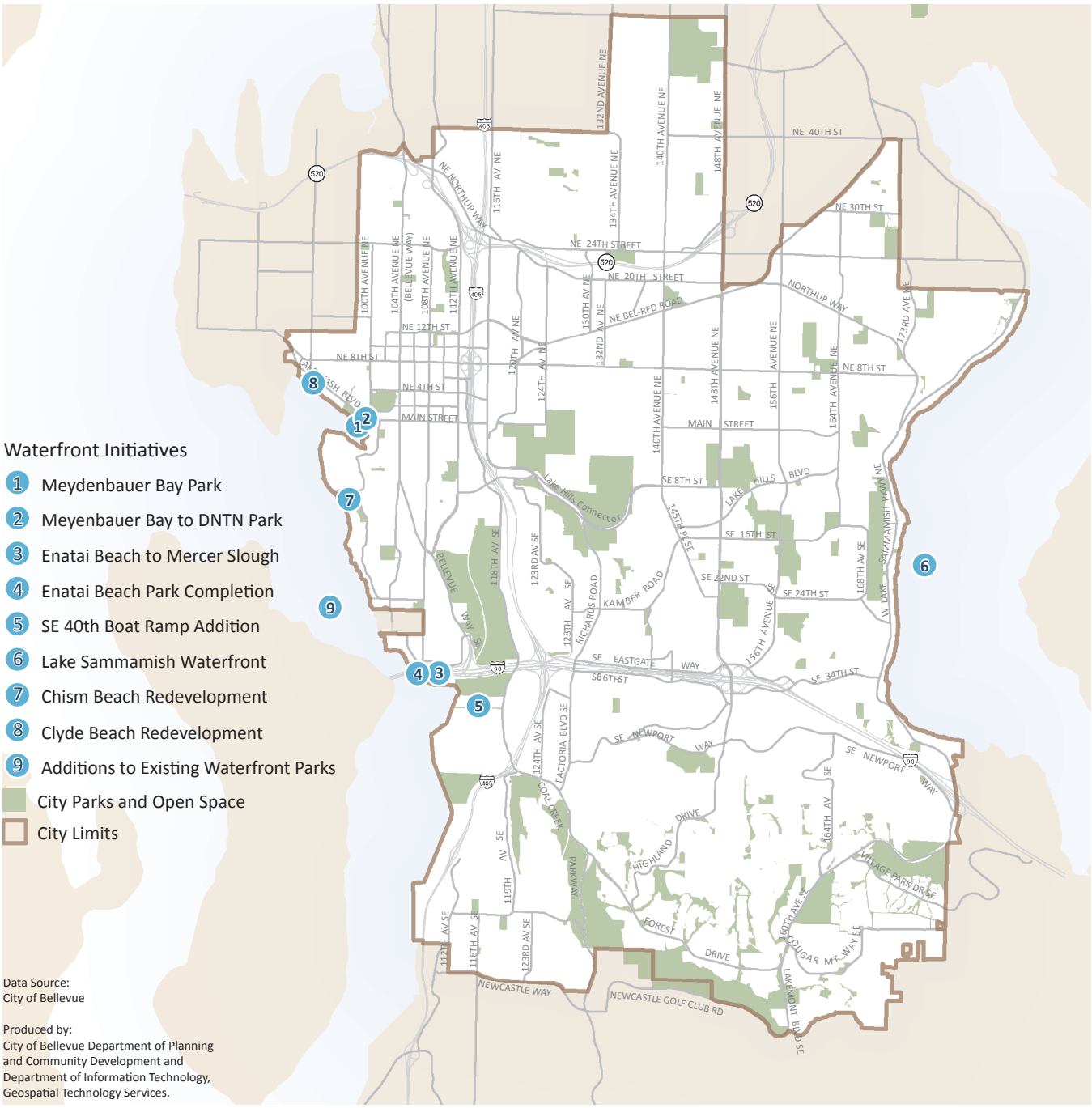


Map PA-3. Regional Park Facilities and Greenway Connections

This map shows regional park facilities and proposed greenways in and near Bellevue. Greenways combine the natural functions and separations provided by a greenbelt with the linear and connected orientation of a parkway. Being connected to different sites via greenways, parklands become more usable, accessible and visible on a day to day basis. Greenways help various parks and open spaces become a system, achieving a sense of integration and completeness. See Bellevue's **Parks and Open Space System Plan** for more details.

Map PA-4. Waterfront Access

This map identifies locations of waterfront initiatives from the Parks and Open Space System Plan where waterfront access is planned to be acquired, developed or enhanced/preserved. Specific locations for initiatives six and nine have not yet been identified as both seek to acquire additional parkland with waterfront access. Details of all of these initiatives can be found in the **Parks and Open Space System Plan**.



GOALS & POLICIES

GOAL

To build a healthy community through an integrated system of exceptional parks, open space, recreation, cultural arts and human services.

POLICIES

Parks & Open Space System

PA-1. Establish a coordinated and connected system of open space and greenways throughout the city that provide multiple benefits including preserving natural systems, protecting wildlife habitat and corridors, and providing land for recreation.

PA-3. Obtain land throughout the community to meet present and future parks and open space needs.

PA-4. Equitably distribute a variety of parks, community centers and other indoor and outdoor recreation facilities throughout the city.

PA-2. Connect Bellevue's parks and trails to the regional system of nearby state, King County and neighboring city parks, greenways, trails and facilities.

PA-6. Obtain, for preservation, natural areas that are sensitive to urbanization or represent a valuable natural and aesthetic resource to the community.

PA-7. Acquire and develop waterfront property to increase public access to Bellevue's lakes.

PARKS & OPEN SPACE SYSTEM PLAN

To meet the community's Parks, Recreation, and Open Space goals, the city is dedicated to:

- Steward a coordinated system of public open spaces that preserves the city's natural character, sustains its urban forest resources, and protects its natural systems, wildlife habitat and wildlife corridors as a legacy for future generations.
- Obtain the land necessary to provide a broad range of recreation opportunities throughout the community.
- Connect parks, neighborhoods, schools, and activity areas together through a coordinated system of trails and open spaces.
- Provide access for all of Bellevue's residents to a variety of park facilities including waterfront, play areas, sports fields, and recreation centers.
- Offer a variety of recreation, athletic, art, social, learning, and environmental education programs.
- Define and enhance neighborhood character by using open space as visual relief to separate and buffer between uses.
- Offer services and programs to all ages and segments of society that provide opportunities for building healthy and productive lives.
- Collaborate with other agencies, public and private, to efficiently meet the community's needs for parks, recreation, cultural opportunities, and open space.

PA-5. Maximize use of public lands by collaborating with other City projects and programs to incorporate utility, storm drainage, underutilized right-of-way and other public lands into the parks and open space system.

PA-14. Develop partnerships with other public agencies and the private sector to provide parks, open space, and cultural and recreation facilities in the city.

PA-10. Actively seek funding from a variety of sources to help implement a park acquisition and development program.

PA-9. Pursue private dedication of land and funds for park related purposes through a variety of methods such as purchase, donation, easement, and land use code incentives.

PA-20. Encourage privately funded recreational and cultural facilities throughout the city, especially in major employment centers.

PA-13. Develop pedestrian and bicycle linkages between neighborhoods and major natural areas, recreation facilities, schools and commercial centers.

PA-21. Collaborate with King County, Sound Transit and neighboring jurisdictions in the planning and development of the regional Eastside Rail Corridor trail system.

PA-22. Encourage the linkage and access of private facilities with those in the public system.

PA-24. Encourage the development of facilities for special purpose recreation.

PA-27. Designate active and passive recreation uses and cultural use of parkland through the master plan approval process.

PA-X1. Provide signage and wayfinding tools to direct individuals to park facilities from nearby streets and trails in order to promote and facilitate public use of parks.

Recreation and Community Services

PA-34. Provide a variety of services and programs accessible to all throughout the city with special emphasis on serving those with limited opportunities including low-income households, youth, individuals with disabilities and older adults.

PA-36. Provide opportunities for individuals to develop a sense of community through services and programs including programs that encourage intercultural interaction.

PA-39. Offer programs that utilize the unique resources and variety of indoor and outdoor facilities within the park system.

PA-X2. Use parks to celebrate, promote and preserve Bellevue's history, cultural arts and local heritage when consistent with the park's design and programming.

PA-15. Develop partnerships with not-for-profit organizations in planning, developing, and utilizing facilities.

PA-16. Develop partnerships with the public school districts to utilize school sites to provide active recreation and cultural facilities.

PA-17. Collaborate with school districts and private and non-profit providers to deliver a coordinated array of recreation, athletic instruction, arts, gathering spaces and community services.

PA-35. Promote partnerships with public and private service providers to meet cultural, recreational, and social needs of the community.

PA-38. Welcome social services at recreation facilities and community centers when they complement the site's recreational and cultural programming.

PA-37. Actively solicit community input in the planning and delivery of services and programs to ensure that they are convenient and beneficial.

PA-X3. Monitor and respond to the community's evolving recreation and community service needs to ensure a diverse mix of relevant and effective facilities and programs.

Stewardship

PA-30. Design, construct, operate, and maintain parklands and facilities to preserve the ecology of natural systems on parklands.

PA-31. Protect and retain, in a natural state, significant trees and vegetation in publicly and privately-dedicated greenbelt areas.

PA-33. Manage Bellevue's forest resources, including street trees, formal plantings, and self-sustaining natural stands, to ensure their long term vitality.

PA-40. Provide environmental stewardship and nature education programs to increase the community's awareness, understanding, and appreciation of Bellevue's natural environment.

Maintenance, Renovation and Redevelopment

PA-32. Conserve energy, water, and other natural resources, and practice efficient and environmentally responsible maintenance and operation procedures.

PA-29. Evaluate existing parks and facilities, and renovate, where appropriate, to maximize efficient maintenance and operating practices, improve safety and accessibility for all users, and to reduce, where feasible, the impacts on adjacent properties.

PA-19. Develop parks and facilities in a quality manner to assure attractiveness, full utilization, and long term efficiency.

PA-28. Establish a funding plan for long term maintenance and operation before constructing park-related facilities.

PA-26. Require a public review process for the conversion to non-recreational use of park lands and facilities.

POLICY CONNECTIONS

The Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Element addresses the distribution of facilities, natural areas, and programs throughout Bellevue to ensure equitable access to all residents. In addition to the policies in this chapter, related policies are included in other parts of the Comprehensive Plan.

The **Capital Facilities** Element supports the City's efforts to develop and expand the parks, trails and open space system.

The **Transportation** Element calls for an extensive system of pedestrian and bicycle connections between parks, homes and businesses.

The **Human Services** Element supports services that promote community and individual health.

The **Environment** Element focuses on preservation and open space and improving air and water quality.

The **Shoreline** Element promotes public access to the city's waterfront.

The **Economic Development** Element recognizes the importance of open space and recreation facilities as a factor in Bellevue's high quality of life standards.

IMPLEMENTATION

Bellevue implements the Comprehensive Plan through numerous actions, including day-to-day operations, capital investments, and review of new development projects. It would be impractical to list every action that will be taken to implement the plan and impossible to identify actions that may be taken in the future. The following list shows some of the relevant plans that implement the Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Element.

Implementation	Type
Parks & Open Space System Plan This plan builds upon the policies in the Comprehensive Plan and includes a long-range capital project list. The Plan helps the City maintain eligibility for grant funding and is a required standard for national accreditation.	**Functional Plan:** updated periodically on a six- to eight-year cycle.
Recreation Plan This plan provides policy specific to the city's provision of recreation programming for Bellevue residents. It guides where public resources will be invested through a focus on older adults, youth, individuals with disabilities, and low-income households.	**Functional Plan:** updated on a five-year cycle.
Bellevue Diversity Initiative The Bellevue Parks & Community Services Department hosts a staff team that facilitates the citywide Bellevue Diversity Initiative. The initiative is a City Council supported program designed to increase the cultural competence of the city as an organization and to increase the city's leadership role in the community on diversity and equity issues.	**Program:** on-going.