

PSRC PLAN REVIEW REPORT & CERTIFICATION RECOMMENDATION

DOWNTOWN BELLEVUE SUBAREA PLAN

September 10, 2020



DOWNTOWN BELLEVUE

Bellevue adopted an update to the Downtown Subarea Plan as part of their Comprehensive Plan in 2018. The update coincides with several major regional transportation enhancement projects, including Sound Transit's East Link project that is scheduled to open to downtown Bellevue in 2023. Downtown Bellevue has been a regional growth center since 1995.

The Downtown Center consists of 410 acres, extending from NE 12th Street south to the Main Street area and from 100th Avenue NE to Interstate 405. As of 2017 there were 50,000 jobs and about 14,000 residents housed in Downtown Bellevue. The 2035 forecast is for an additional 22,700 jobs and 8,200 residents, or roughly half of the city's future employment and residential growth.

REGIONAL GROWTH CENTERS CERTIFICATION

VISION 2040 includes DP-Action-17 (p. 98) that directs jurisdictions with regional growth centers and/or manufacturing/industrial centers to develop subarea plans for those centers. This expectation has been in place since 2003 and is required for all new regional centers. The Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) and local governments have worked together to develop an overall process for reviewing and certifying that regional center plans are consistent with VISION 2040, the Regional Transportation Plan, and the Adopted Policy and Plan Review Process.¹

In 2018, PSRC adopted the [Regional Centers Framework Update](#). VISION 2050, an update to VISION 2040, is anticipated to be adopted in fall 2020. The Regional Centers Framework calls for review of centers in 2025, following local plan updates. All regional centers are expected to have subarea plans adopted and updated to be consistent with the Framework and VISION 2050 by that time. Certification of a subarea plan now reaffirms the planning work for the regional growth center is consistent with VISION 2040 and is an opportunity to identify additional planning work required by 2025.

CERTIFICATION RECOMMENDATION

Based on the review of the Bellevue Downtown Regional Growth Center Subarea Plan, the following action is recommended to the PSRC Growth Management Policy Board, Transportation Policy Board, and Executive Board:

The Puget Sound Regional Council certifies that the Downtown Bellevue Regional Growth Center Subarea Plan addresses planning expectations for regional growth centers.

¹ The specific requirements for center planning are provided in [PSRC's Plan Review Manual](#), and the process is also described in [VISION 2040, Part IV: Implementation](#). Certification of the jurisdiction's comprehensive plan for consistency with the regional transportation plan, regionally established guidelines and policies, and Growth Management Act requirements for transportation planning is completed through a separate board action.

Review of Regional Growth Center Planning

PSRC worked with the city to complete the review and develop the remainder of this report, which contains a summary of the PSRC review of the Downtown Bellevue subarea plan. Under each heading, the scope of the certification review, as guided by the [Plan Review Manual](#) and [Regional Center Plans Checklist](#), is listed in high-level bullets. Discussion in each topic area highlights exemplary provisions of the plan, as well as issues identified through the certification review where future work on the part of the city may more fully address VISION 2040, the Regional Transportation Plan, and center planning requirements. Future work should be considered as jurisdictions update local plans in 2024 to be consistent with VISION 2050 and the Regional Centers Framework.

The review contained in this section follows the format and content established in the Regional Center Plans Checklist, covering the seven major categories (center plan concept, environment, land use, housing, economy, public services, and transportation).

Center Concept

SCOPE OF REVIEW

The Regional Center Plans Checklist calls for subarea plans to address the following center concepts:

- Vision for the center**, including a commitment to compact, pedestrian and transit-oriented development.
- Identification of the area** designated as a regional growth center and relationship to other plans.
- A market analysis** of the center's development potential.

DISCUSSION

The Downtown Bellevue plan effectively addresses the Center Concept requirements.

- The plan clearly describes the center, its relationship to citywide planning, and broader county and regional context for the center and its future development.
- The plan sets a clear goal to become a primary hub for cultural, commercial, entertainment, residential, and other regional uses in the Eastside region of King County.
- The plan describes the center's regional role and existing market potential, demonstrating that growth expectations are realistic and achievable. The city's economic development plan is currently being updated to support economic growth within the center.

Environment

SCOPE OF REVIEW

The Regional Center Plans Checklist calls for subarea plans to address the following environmental policy topics:

- Critical/environmentally sensitive areas**, including inventories and relevant policies and programs.
- Parks and open space**, including public spaces and civic places, and provisions to encourage accessible open space.
- Innovative stormwater management** policies and programs.
- Air pollution and greenhouse gas emission reduction** policies and programs.

DISCUSSION

The Downtown Bellevue plan effectively addresses many of the Environment requirements.

- The plan includes numerous goals to expand open space amenities, encourage recreation, create connections between key parks and open spaces, and preserve significant older trees.

- The plan recommends increasing the number of available charging stations for electric vehicles in both private and public parking spaces, while ensuring those spaces are made permanently available for charging.

The following comments should be considered in future review of the subarea policies:

- In addition to promoting electric vehicle infrastructure, consider adopting additional policies that more comprehensively address greenhouse gas emission reduction and climate change mitigation in the center. If applicable, expand on how citywide efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions relate to the center.
- The city's Environment Element of the comprehensive plan includes a detailed impervious surface analysis. Consider acknowledging this work within the Downtown plan to specifically discuss surface area and runoff in the subarea where the percent of impervious surfaces appears to be higher than the city as a whole. Also consider adding language to reference how city-wide strategies that support innovative stormwater management practices through redevelopment and retrofits can be applied within the center.

Land Use

SCOPE OF REVIEW

The Regional Center Plans Checklist calls for center plans to address the following land use topics:

Defined boundaries and shape for the center that are compact and easily walkable.

Residential and employment growth targets that accommodate a significant share of the jurisdiction's growth, as well as residential densities and building intensities with capacity to accommodate these levels of growth.

Mix, distribution and location of existing and future land uses described and mapped. Encourage a mix of complementary uses.

Design standards for pedestrian-friendly, transit-oriented development and other transit-supportive planning that orients land uses around transit.

DISCUSSION

The Downtown Bellevue plan effectively addresses the Land Use requirements.

- The plan provides detailed recommendations for each district in the Downtown Area. There is a clear vision for each district that builds on one another's strengths when considered as an entire downtown area. The plan also includes policies that address the current urban form and use of each district and structures future uses around a cohesive and complementary vision for the downtown.
- Population and employment targets have been adopted for the center and are reflected in the Downtown Element, planning for an additional 22,700 jobs and 8,200 residents by 2035. Additionally, a detailed Future Land Use map demonstrates how this growth will be accommodated and distributed throughout the center. Once new citywide growth targets are adopted for the 2024 local plan update, Bellevue should plan to update the Downtown center growth targets as well.
- The plan provides thoughtful design standards with pedestrian and cyclist use and safety in mind. These standards include improving the pedestrian and bicycling environment as it relates to accessing mass transit. The plan specifically acknowledges the importance of not only providing pedestrian and cycling amenities, but prioritizing the access, comfort, and safety of those modes above others.

Housing

SCOPE OF REVIEW

The Regional Center Plans Checklist calls for subarea plans to address the following housing policy topics:

Existing and targeted housing units.

Tailored provisions for a variety of housing types, affordable housing, and special housing needs.

Implementation strategies for addressing housing targets and goals.

DISCUSSION

The Downtown Bellevue plan effectively addresses the Housing requirements.

- The plan encourages a range of housing types and densities to accommodate future growth within the Center.
- The plan gives special attention to providing housing units for workers already living in Bellevue as well as those likely to fill jobs created in Downtown. The plan supports the use of tax incentives to encourage additional workforce housing.
- The plan acknowledges the value of partnering with organizations such as A Regional Coalition of Housing (ARCH) and Downtown Action to Save Housing (DASH) to address housing needs.

The following comments should be considered in future review of the subarea policies:

- Bellevue has been proactive in addressing the significant challenges to housing affordability within the city by investing resources in advancing affordable housing in the city, including the 2017 Affordable Housing Strategy. The subarea plan should be strengthened by tying this citywide housing work to the center and recognizing that the center plan is an opportunity to identify market-based affordable housing strategies, utilize the multifamily tax exemption (MFTE) program, and adopt other tools that increase the share of affordable housing. As Bellevue is anticipating half of the city's overall growth to occur in the center, it is important that the subarea plan not only encourages workforce housing, but also demonstrates how a portion of the growth will meet housing needs for various income levels, including affordable, subsidized, and special needs housing needs.

Economy

SCOPE OF REVIEW

The Regional Center Plans Checklist calls for subarea plans to address the following economy policy topics:

Key sectors and industry clusters in the center.

Economic development policies and programs for the center.

DISCUSSION

The Downtown Bellevue plan effectively addresses the Economy requirements.

- The plan promotes a clear economic vision of developing Downtown as the Eastside's most concentrated and diverse regional retail district.
- The plan details policies to promote economic development from a variety of key industries and sectors, both public and private, including performing arts, civic spaces, and commercial retail.
- The plan includes considerations for stable tax rates and predictable regulatory frameworks to maintain an attractive local economic environment, specifically intended to attract private investment.

Public Services

SCOPE OF REVIEW

The Center Subarea Plan Checklist calls for center plans to address the following public services topics:

Local capital plans for infrastructure, such as sewer, water, gas, electric and telecommunications, including financing and strategies to ensure facilities are provided consistent with planned growth.

DISCUSSION

The Downtown Bellevue plan effectively addresses the Public Services requirements.

- The city considers impacts of growth on existing levels of service and has a plan in place for maintaining adequate services as the center grows.
- The plan includes policies that seek to provide public services while minimizing impacts on aesthetics in public spaces, with specific attention paid to the pedestrian experience.
- The plan recommends requiring developer funding for extensions of collection and distribution lines.

Transportation

SCOPE OF REVIEW

The Regional Center Plans Checklist calls for subarea plans to address the following transportation policy topics:

Integrated multimodal transportation network, including pedestrian and bicycle facilities, as well as linkages to adjacent neighborhoods and districts.

Regional high-capacity transit, local transit and coordination with transit agencies.

Complete streets provisions for pedestrians, bicyclists, transit, vehicles, and – where appropriate – freight.

Context-sensitive design provisions for transportation facilities.

Environmentally friendly street treatments (green streets).

Level-of-service standards and concurrency provisions tailored for the center to encourage transit.

Parking management strategy that addresses supply of parking, on-street parking and mitigating effects of parking.

Mode-split goals.

DISCUSSION

The Downtown Bellevue plan effectively addresses the Transportation requirements.

- The plan provides a clear vision for future downtown mobility with policy recommendations that provide options for pedestrians, cyclists, transit, and private or shared vehicles. This vision has been created to specifically integrate connectivity with the new light rail station opening in 2023.
- The plan considers complete street provisions, having recently expanded mobility options for cyclists through the recently opened 108th Avenue Bikeway.
- The plan provides clear connections to Bellevue's Transit Master Plan which is designed to influence transit agencies to maximize transit performance.
- The plan stresses the importance of working in tandem with service providers to increase mobility in Downtown Bellevue. The plan includes various improvements that the city can make to increase transit ridership.
- The plan features mode-split goals for 2030 that intend to decrease single-occupancy vehicle (SOV) trips. Projected mode share in 2030 is 50% SOV, 17% high-occupancy vehicle (HOV), 32% transit, and 1% walk and bicycle.

Conclusion

PSRC thanks the city for working through the plan review and certification process for the center subarea plan. The Downtown Bellevue plan effectively addresses the requirements of the Regional Center Plan Checklist, demonstrating consistency with VISION 2040, and is recommended for certification. The adopted Regional Centers Framework calls for review of centers and center plans again in 2025, following the adoption of VISION 2050 and local plan updates. In 2025, PSRC review will ensure that center plans, center growth targets, and local comprehensive plans have been updated to be consistent with VISION 2050 and the Regional Centers Framework.

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