



City of Bellevue Retail Study Implementation Plan

The following implementation strategies are informed by Bellevue's Economic Development Plan, and most recently a study of the City's retail sector which examined existing programs, opportunities, code, peer districts and other components that could help support Bellevue's retail sector. Many implementation strategies outlined below are recommendations outlined in the initial Retail Study that were generated in consultation with city stakeholders across departments.

These implementation strategies and the associated initiatives are not solely the responsibility of the City. Private sector partners, district-based organizations, and non-profit organizations all have roles in implementing the findings of this study in addition to the City. The steps below encompass simple operational changes to large ongoing programs, all of which are intended to benefit Bellevue's retail sector.

Why is Retail Important?

The City of Bellevue maintains a focus on ensuring its retail sector is robust and growing for five primary reasons:

- Quality of Life
 - Bellevue residents often identify Bellevue's retailers and restaurants as key drivers of Bellevue's unparalleled quality of life.
- Amenities
 - Primary employers often place a high value on amenities for employees, both around their offices and generally in the community to attract and retain the workforce.
- Tax Revenue
 - In 2023, Bellevue's sales tax generated **\$92.9M** in general fund revenues, one of the larger single sources of revenue for the City to provide services.
- Service provision
 - Retailers provide vital services to resident's day-to-day life ranging from grocery stores to hardware stores.
- Multicultural Offerings
 - With 42% of Bellevue's residents being foreign born, ensuring our retailers are meeting the cultural needs and desires of specific populations is vital to the sector's success and ensuring Bellevue is a welcoming community.



Current City of Bellevue Policy

These implementation strategies are intended to advance the Citywide policies listed below.

Comprehensive Plan

- **ED-19.** Emphasize economic development of Downtown as a major regional economic center and retail destination.
- **ED-20.** Recognize retail strength as an engine of economic activity and a magnet for visitors.
- **ED-21.** Support economic development in the city's commercial areas.
- **ED-22.** Support efforts that promote tourism, hotel, retail, and arts businesses.

Economic Development Plan

- **R 1.** Retain and recruit a healthy and diverse retail mix, including neighborhood and resident-serving businesses throughout the city.
- **R 2.** Encourage the preservation of existing spaces and the creation of new spaces that are suitable for independent retail, neighborhood services, restaurant, and beverage establishments.
- **R 3.** Create contiguous, high-quality retail experiences in major employment centers by designating streets as active or non-active in future land use updates.
- **R 4.** Develop an auto services retention strategy that ensures a future presence for auto dealerships and related businesses to preserve services for residents.
- **SB 3.** Encourage the preservation of existing spaces and the creation of new spaces that are suitable for small businesses

This implementation plan focusses action items into following key areas:

1. District Development

- a. Bellevue's retail focused business districts have unique and well-defined identities and niches.



2. **Small Business Programming**

- a. Programs to support retail business formation and growth.

3. **Land Use Code**

- a. Bellevue's code has adequate provisions to actively support a diverse and strong retail sector.

Each implementation item lists five details related to the specifics of each policy.

- Level of Effort
 - Refers to staff time required to complete, either from the City of Bellevue's perspective, or a relevant partner organization's
- Responsible Party
 - Refers to the primary party responsible for implementing the recommendation
- Priority
 - Relates to the time sensitivity and impact of the proposal
- Completion Date
 - The date either a change is implemented, or an ongoing program is created
- Budget
 - Ranges from \$ (<\$10,000) to \$\$ (>\$10,000 - \$100,000) to \$\$\$ (>\$100,000)

District Development

A key finding of the retail study's survey outreach and comparative analysis of other districts was that many of Bellevue's retail centers lack unique senses of place and individual identities. To address this, the City's district development program should develop these unique identities in partnership with district businesses. This can be done through informal outreach, formal district organization frameworks, business improvement districts, events, and other mechanisms.

"Despite possessing a high concentration of shopping centers and commodity retail destinations [...] Bellevue's lack of placemaking is likely hurting the city's retail industry." (Pg. 129)

While the specific format of implementation varied across districts, district cohesion and identity were a constant element of successful peer districts analyzed. For example, NoMa in DC has a robust Business Improvement District, Beverly Hills / Century City has an internationally recognized brand, and Miami's Design District was driven by a private owner's vision for a cohesive district.



Community Development
**Cultural & Economic
 Development**

- Create and maintain retail district profiles for utilization by businesses, property owners, brokers and community members including market information.

Level of Effort	Responsible Party	Priority	Completion Date	Budget Req.
Low	District Based Orgs.	Medium	09/2024	\$

DD - 2

- Implement business improvement districts in relatively more mature retail districts including Downtown, BelRed Arts District, and Old Bellevue to promote cleanliness, placemaking, and district management.

Level of Effort	Responsible Party	Priority	Completion Date	Budget Req.
High	District Based Orgs.	High	06/2025	\$\$

DD-3

- Explore the potential impact and interest in business improvement districts or other district-based organizations for retail districts in Bellevue that require improved placemaking, cleanliness, etc. but have less robust organization including Crossroads and Factoria.

Level of Effort	Responsible Party	Priority	Completion Date	Budget Req.
Low	Bellevue CED	Low	12/2024	N/A

DD-4

- Improve retail districts through placemaking efforts, including hiring local artists to paint façades, crosswalks, or other public space in a unique way to better reflect identity of the community.

Level of Effort	Responsible Party	Priority	Completion Date	Budget Req.
Medium	District Based Orgs.	Low	06/2026 ->	\$\$

DD-5

- Partner with outside organizations to host community events and small-scale activations within business districts, possibly via a competitive grant program.



Community Development
**Cultural & Economic
 Development**

Level of Effort	Responsible Party	Priority	Completion Date	Budget Req.
Low	District Based Orgs.	Medium	01/2025 ->	\$

DD-6

- Launch a retail recruitment program targeting specific sectors with high leakage or community demand which could include independent restaurants, breweries, large format retailers, or nightlife establishments.

Level of Effort	Responsible Party	Priority	Completion Date	Budget Req.
Medium	Bellevue CED	Medium	09/2024 ->	\$

DD - 7

- Continue to streamline permits for carnivals and fairs and update the special events process. Consider adjusting the definition of a “special event” to include only events with 3,000 people or more.

Level of Effort	Responsible Party	Priority	Completion Date	Budget Req.
Medium	Bellevue CED	Medium	12/2024 ->	N/A

DD - 8

- Implement a food truck program as outlined in the city’s Curb Management Plan.

Level of Effort	Responsible Party	Priority	Completion Date	Budget Req.
High	Transportation	High	01/2025	\$

Small Business Support

The City of Bellevue has long supported small businesses as a broad focus to provide means of wealth creation, economic diversity, and innovation. Beyond those aspects, small / independent businesses in the retail sector often provide unique experiences, a sense of stewardship for their location, and vibrancy to a community that strengthens the overall sector. Small businesses are often an avenue for women and minorities to enter the economy. Including that small businesses have

“The [Small Business] focus group did reflect on large concerns surrounding their ability to sustain their businesses as Bellevue grows, develops, and affordability decreases.”



traditionally been more innovative than large businesses, a strong small/independent retail business sector can help toward closing the wealth and opportunity gap to historically disadvantaged communities.

The 2023 study identified many specific interventions and actions to alleviate barriers small businesses face in Bellevue. Many aspects related to the massive affordability barrier small businesses face in Bellevue, however many other barriers and potential interventions were identified.

SB - 1

- Create a tenant improvement grant program for small businesses, innovative retail concepts or unique tenants such as breweries to cover permitting fees and / or capital costs associated with entering a space.

Level of Effort	Responsible Party	Priority	Completion Date	Budget Req.
High	Bellevue CED	Medium	12/2024 ->	\$\$\$

SB - 2

- Create a free temporary access program for physical spaces, market stalls, etc. to give trial access to physical retailing space for small businesses.

Level of Effort	Responsible Party	Priority	Completion Date	Budget Req.
High	Bellevue CED / District Based Orgs	Low	06/2025	\$

SB - 3

- Explore creation of a small business loan guarantee program to improve small business access to capital.

Level of Effort	Responsible Party	Priority	Completion Date	Budget Req.
High	Business Service Providers	Low	01/2026	\$\$\$

SB - 4

- Explore creation of a dedicated retail / small business permitting liaison to guide small businesses and retailers through city permitting process and provide certain permit review services.

Level of Effort	Responsible Party	Priority	Completion Date	Budget Req.
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Community Development
**Cultural & Economic
 Development**

Medium	Bellevue CED + Development Services	Medium	01/2026	\$\$
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SB - 5

- Expand technical assistance offerings to include lease negotiation consultation, operations, capital improvements, regulatory navigation, hiring, human resources for small businesses where not already present

Level of Effort	Responsible Party	Priority	Completion Date	Budget Req.
Low	Business Service Providers	Low	01/2025	\$\$

SB - 6

- Expand technical assistance, access to capital and training to underserved business owners via outreach to trusted messengers and language assistance.

Level of Effort	Responsible Party	Priority	Completion Date	Budget Req.
Medium	Business Service Providers	High	01/2025	\$

SB - 7

- Investigate the feasibility of developing small business incubators as part of a public-private partnership, providing below-market rents for scaling retail businesses.

Level of Effort	Responsible Party	Priority	Completion Date	Budget Req.
Medium	CED / Business Service Providers	Medium	09/2024	\$

Land Use

Bellevue’s land use code provides the foundation for a strong retail sector. While the code cannot and should not be used to address all issues, foresight in planning can enable public and private actors to develop a strong retail environment. Additionally, due to Washington State regulations related to incentives, land use incentives are one of the few direct incentive levers the City can use for public benefit.



Many of the implementation recommendations in the land use section will have varied timelines for implementation. Some are feasible to integrate into ongoing work related to the Comprehensive Plan, Wilburton and BelRed updates. Others will need to be integrated into future Finally, some recommendations in this section are programmatic in nature.

LU - 1

- Explore interventions that encourage developers to set aside or designate space for food trucks in appropriate projects to promote a wider range of retail offerings in the city.

Level of Effort	Responsible Party	Priority	Completion Date	Budget Req.
Low	Development Services	Low	06/2024	N/A

LU - 2

- Consider several changes to adopted parking requirements in mixed use districts, including:
 - Decrease or eliminate parking minimum requirements in Wilburton, BelRed and Downtown land use districts for retail uses.
 - Make parking requirements consistent across ground floor uses to better enable spaces to switch between active uses

Level of Effort	Responsible Party	Priority	Completion Date	Budget Req.
Medium	Development Services	High	01/2026	N/A

LU - 3

- Add bay depth requirements as part of sidewalk-oriented development standards to ensure retail spaces provide optimal store layouts with a deviation system for unique site layouts. (20.25D.130.C - sidewalk-oriented development).

“Retail bay depth is another critical design component to establishing successful and lasting retailers. Store layout planners typically assume about a 60-foot bay depth, with the ideal number falling somewhere between 55 and 65 feet.” – Pg. 151



Community Development
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Level of Effort	Responsible Party	Priority	Completion Date	Budget Req.
Medium	Development Services	Medium	01/2026	N/A

LU - 4

- Expand Downtown incentive zoning provisions related to enhanced streetscapes and street-activating retail to other mixed-use areas such as BelRed, Wilburton, and others.

Level of Effort	Responsible Party	Priority	Completion Date	Budget Req.
Low	Development Services	High	01/2026	N/A

LU-5

- Continue to allow pedestrian bridges in certain areas of Downtown as a non-bonus-able amenity.

Level of Effort	Responsible Party	Priority	Completion Date	Budget Req.
Low	Development Services	Low	TBD	N/A

LU- 6

- Articulate and clarify existing explicit façade transparency standards, where appropriate for important retail districts.

Level of Effort	Responsible Party	Priority	Completion Date	Budget Req.
Medium	Development Services + CED	Low	01/2026	N/A

LU - 7

- Include trail-oriented retail space in the Wilburton incentive stack for properties adjacent to Eastrail, similar to the Grand Connection incentive in Downtown.

Level of Effort	Responsible Party	Priority	Completion Date	Budget Req.
Low	Development Services	High	01/2026	N/A



LU-8

- Concentrate ground floor retail requirements within specified nodes or streets to avoid blanket ground floor retail requirements across business districts.

Level of Effort	Responsible Party	Priority	Completion Date	Budget Req.
Medium	Development Services	Medium	01/2026	N/A

LU-9

- Avoid capping retail spaces at 25,000 SF.

Level of Effort	Responsible Party	Priority	Completion Date	Budget Req.
Low	Development Services	Medium	01/2025	N/A

LU-10

- Incentivize affordable commercial space for small and independent businesses via either inclusion in the in the FAR amenity incentive stack or by providing FAR exemptions in Wilburton. This could include below market rental rates or donation of retail condos to a non-profit partner.

Level of Effort	Responsible Party	Priority	Completion Date	Budget Req.
Medium	Development Services	High	01/2025	N/A

LU-11

- Incentivize affordable commercial space for creative businesses and non-profits via either inclusion in the in the FAR amenity incentive stack or by providing FAR exemptions in BelRed. This could include below market rental rates or donation of retail condos to a non-profit partner.

Level of Effort	Responsible Party	Priority	Completion Date	Budget Req.
Medium	Development Services	High	01/2025	N/A



LU-12

- Incentivize or require a mix of retail space footprints including small / micro ground floor retail space in designated retail nodes

Level of Effort	Responsible Party	Priority	Completion Date	Budget Req.
Medium	Development Services	Medium	01/2025	N/A

LU-13

- Improve pedestrian pathways and accessibility in Factoria.

Level of Effort	Responsible Party	Priority	Completion Date	Budget Req.
Low	Development Services	Low	01/2026	N/A

LU-14

- Maintain Auto dealerships as an allowable use outside of transit nodes where they are currently allowable.

“Based purely upon projected retail growth by category, the largest single user of new retail space would be auto dealerships” Pg. 121

Level of Effort	Responsible Party	Priority	Completion Date	Budget Req.
Low	Development Services	High	09/2024	N/A

LU-15

- Explore designating auto showrooms as an allowable ground floor use of mixed-use developments.

Level of Effort	Responsible Party	Priority	Completion Date	Budget Req.
Medium	Development Services	High	01/2025	N/A

LU - 16



Community Development
**Cultural & Economic
Development**

- Allow for Development / Community Benefits Agreements to obtain small business space and pedestrian realm improvements to facilitate retail activity.

Level of Effort	Responsible Party	Priority	Completion Date	Budget Req.
Medium	Development Services	High		N/A

Misc - 1

- Improve retail sector monitoring using sales per square foot or customer traffic flows, rather than gross square feet of retail or other imprecise metrics

Level of Effort	Responsible Party	Priority	Completion Date	Budget Req.
Low	Bellevue CED + Finance	Low	09/2024	\$
