

Public Engagement



Public Engagement

Overview

The Grand Connection is a large scale placemaking and planning initiative that holds the potential for a sweeping new vision for public space and connectivity. It also affects businesses, residents, and visitors to Bellevue. In order to craft a vision that builds community and stakeholder support, a robust public engagement strategy was developed. This strategy included conventional outreach methods of interviews with the public and stakeholders, and also pursued new strategies to reach a broader audience that was representative of Bellevue’s population. Many of the new strategies relied on web and technology distribution in an effort to acquire responses in a timely and efficient manner while reaching the largest audience possible. The City will continue its engagement following the release of this plan by distributing this information via various means and outlets.



Interviews
 Kate Forrester of Herrera Environmental Consultants interviews patrons at the Compass Plaza food trucks to better understand how they would use improved public spaces. Interviews were also conducted at the Downtown Park and Transit Center.



Engagement Map
 A fourteen foot by six foot map in Bellevue City Hall collected hundreds of comments on what residents would like to see incorporated as part of the Grand Connection. The map, featured on *King 5* news, was replicated as an online tool.



Youth Engagement
 Students of Bellevue’s Big Picture High School develop ideas on how they would use the Grand Connection and how to make Downtown a more attractive destination for teenagers.

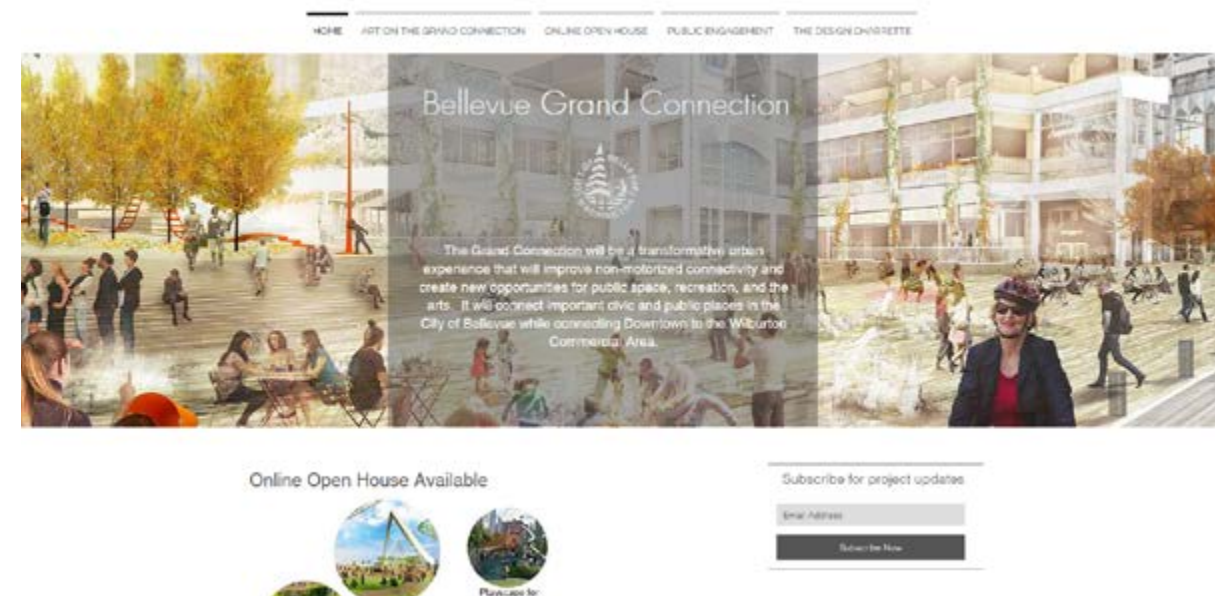


Tactical Urbanism
 Attendees of the *Enliven Wilburton!* event tell the City and King County what they imagine for the future of the Grand Connection, Eastside Rail Corridor, and Wilburton Commercial Area.

Website

As a graphic intensive project, the City launched a project specific website to best illustrate the work. This website began with the intent of showcasing the results of the charrette with Bellevue Arts Museum and as a means to quickly exhibit the creative energy around the event while a print publication was in production. Following the completion of significant work related to the Downtown segment of the Grand Connection the website transitioned to focusing more on the visioning process and became a resource for online open houses, public feedback and input, and surveys.

The website has become an essential part of the visioning process. It became the primary means to showcase the visioning process, while engaging an audience that is less likely to visit City Hall for in person open houses. At the time of this report the website has been viewed over 7,000 times, in 46 different countries, and 40 states. Additionally, nearly 100 comments were submitted in response to the design proposals and recommendations along the route. The City also used the website to distribute online polls and surveys, discussed later in this document.



▲ Grand Connection Website Homepage

Interviews

Throughout the visioning process City staff and consultants employed various forms of engagement that attempted to reach a broad and diverse audience. In support of these efforts it was also important to understand what users of the existing spaces hoped to see from the visioning process. The design team visited strategic locations that are currently heavily used such as Downtown Park, Compass Plaza, the food trucks, and the Bellevue Transit Center to pose a series of questions on how people currently use these spaces, how they would like to see them improved, and what might encourage them to use the spaces at alternative times of the day, week, and seasons.

Interviews were also conducted with key stakeholders along the route to better understand their interests in improving public space and to begin former partnerships and opportunities for collaboration.

Common Interview Responses:

Compass Plaza

- Covered seating areas
- Farmers Market
- Music and live performances
- Child friendly
- Conflict free bicycle route
- Landscaping

Downtown Park

- Weather protection
- Food kiosks
- Food trucks
- Performance space
- More play areas
- Weekend market
- Cultural events
- More seating

Transit Center

- Better wayfinding
- More seating
- Food and beverage options
- Bike share
- Play area
- Art
- Integrated technology



▲ Interviews with Users of Key Public Spaces in Downtown Bellevue - Images courtesy of Herrera

Engagement Map

As part of the charrette open house the consultant team installed a fourteen foot by six foot map in the Bellevue Arts Museum Gallery. The map was installed so that attendees could post comments on their priorities and visions for the Grand Connection. The comments were categorized by; what is needed on the route, what existing elements they like about the route, and places where it is dangerous for pedestrians and cyclists.

Following the charrette, the map was installed in the Bellevue City Hall concourse, capturing a large audience that visits City Hall daily. In support of the physical map an interactive online version was launched on the project website. A combined total of over 300 comments were received on the maps, and the City Hall map received coverage by *King 5* news.

The comments generated via the maps largely related to places that could be improved for pedestrian and cyclist safety, new opportunities for programming, and celebrating some of the existing features that people enjoyed.

A large number of the comments were focused on improving opportunities for programming at the Downtown Park. These comments included festivals, food trucks, and more active uses in and around the park. There were also several comments that wanted to preserve many of the passive features and spaces in the Downtown Park. There was broad support and desire to encourage the Bellevue Arts Museum to engage and open to the existing Pedestrian Corridor, in an effort to better integrate art into the built environment and urban fabric.

The farmer's market was also a highly popular subject on the maps. Those that commented regarding the farmer's market wanted to see a permanent home in Compass Plaza, and in a space that was oriented more towards people. Enhancing the park-like experience of the city through additional vegetation and green space was also a highly popular comment.

Over 300 comments were received from the online and City Hall engagement maps.



▲ Attendees of the Grand Connection Visioning Charrette Leave Comments on the Engagement Map



▲ Grand Connection Engagement Map Installed in Bellevue City Hall



▲ Summary of Engagement Comments by Location - Image by Herrera

Tactical Urbanism and Events

With some elements of the project requiring long term commitments for change it became essential to demonstrate to stakeholders and residents the potential for the project. King County and the City partnered to host the *Enliven Wilburton!* event to demonstrate the potential of the Eastside Rail Corridor and the Grand Connection interface. A late fall cafe was established at this potential intersection for one evening, and nearly 200 residents, stakeholders, and other interested members of the public assisted in activating the trail as a future public space and key intersection.

Despite an evening of rain, attendees filled the space to enjoy music, food, beverage, and exercises that allowed participants to convey their image of the two projects, as well as the future of the Wilburton Commercial Area. The event, intended to become an annual celebration, sparked a number of other concepts for inexpensive programming improvements to public space, discussed in the implementation section of this document.



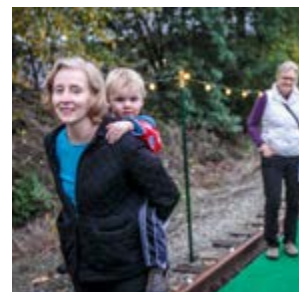
Existing Conditions

The existing conditions of the Eastside Rail Corridor prior to the event.



Temporary Improvements

The rails were covered to provide accessibility to all attendees and created an experience as they entered the event, showcasing the work completed to date for the Grand Connection, Eastside Rail Corridor, and Wilburton Commercial Area.



Public Participation

The event brought residents, stakeholders, and other interested parties of all ages to realize the potential of the intersection of the two projects.



A Big Party

Attendees enjoyed live music, food, beverage, conversation, and activities that helped to visualize the future of this important intersection.

Surveys and Polls

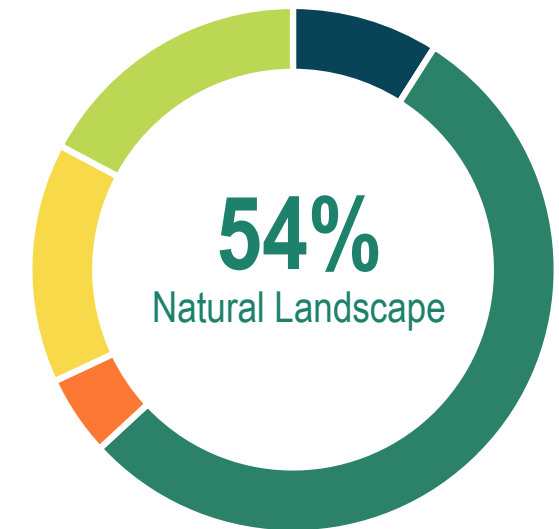
Surveys and polls were administered during the visioning process to help inform the process. These polls and surveys were distributed through the project website and allowed the design team and staff to collect feedback and input from the public in a relatively short amount of time, allowing the design team to be responsive and flexible during the visioning process.

The surveys conducted helped inform ideas related to art and culture, the overall identity of the route, and cohesive design strategies such as paving. Additional surveys will be made available as part of this framework plan.

Route Identity

The route identity will establish the aesthetic quality and experience of the Grand Connection. Three overall route identities were recommended as part of the visioning process, described in Chapter Four. As part of the survey process the City asked respondents to identify their preference for the Grand Connection identity. Respondents selected from the three primary identities established as part of the visioning process; a natural landscape, a playful landscape, and a collaborative historical landscape. Additionally, choices were offered for technology and a category defined as other.

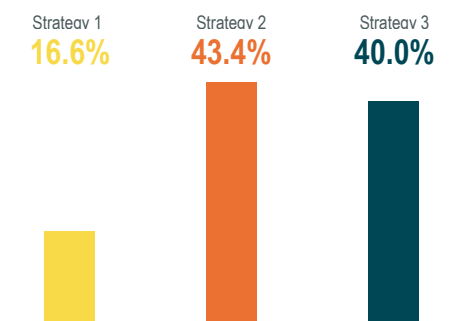
A total of 122 respondents answered the one question poll hosted on the project website for one month. The identity of natural landscape was the overwhelming favorite, earning more than 50 percent of responses. The category of other was a distant second and was a combination of unrelated comments, art, and connectivity. Following other, technology received 15% support and history and playfulness both receiving less than 10% support.



What should be the Grand Connection identity?

Paving Strategies

Similar to the one question poll regarding identity, the City conducted a poll regarding the preference of paving strategies. Described in Chapter Five, each paving strategy seeks to create a distinct contiguous aesthetic quality along the route. The three options presented included a mixture of hardscape and landscape options that responded to the urban and natural surrounding context



Which paving strategy do you prefer?

Art Survey

An essential goal of the Grand Connection is to enhance opportunities for art and culture in Bellevue. To better understand the forms of art and culture residents, workers, visitors, and stakeholders would like to see, the City and consultant launched an online preference survey.

The survey was intended to capture perceptions of public art in Bellevue, where respondents would like to see art installations and events, and the type of installations and events. A preference survey was included that provided a range of images intended to represent various mediums of art and culture, and to capture a snapshot of preferred styles. Additionally the survey sought to better understand what existing cultural events respondents preferred, and that if they were not engaged in existing events, to better understand what the barriers of entry or interest may be.

A total of 321 respondents took the survey during a five week period. A majority of respondents were Bellevue residents, 58 percent, with 24 percent of the respondents being visitors of Bellevue, and 18 percent employed in the city. The City employed multiple subscriber lists, social media outreach, and targeted groups to solicit their input.

The majority of respondents did not feel that Bellevue had strong art and cultural offerings. This was true amongst all age groups with the exception of those over the age of 65. Those under 25 were evenly split on their satisfaction with existing art and cultural offerings. The least satisfied age group were those between the ages of 35 to 44, followed closely by those ages 55 to 65.

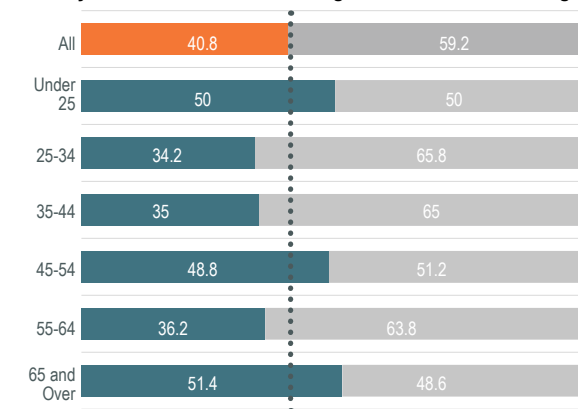
Respondents had a strong preference for art to be implemented at the Downtown Park and Pedestrian Corridor (Bellevue Way to 106th Avenue NE). They also voiced a strong support for supporting activities to occur in the park and utilizing the urban landscape as a canvas for art installations.

Respondents were also asked about a number of existing events related to art in Bellevue and whether they attended. They were also asked about their feelings towards the events or why they have not attended. This allowed the City to identify barriers to participation. The most common barriers included:

- The quality or relevance of the art or events;
- Awareness of events
- Overall mobility; including but not limited to transit, parking, or congestion.

A summary of the art and culture plan can be found in Chapter 6 *Art and the Grand Connection* and as a separate, full report.

Do you feel Bellevue has strong art and cultural offerings?

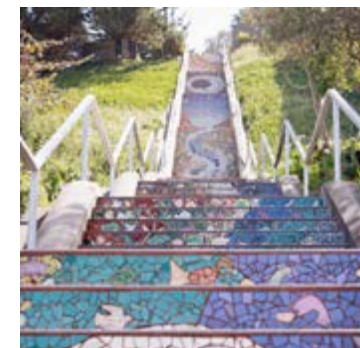
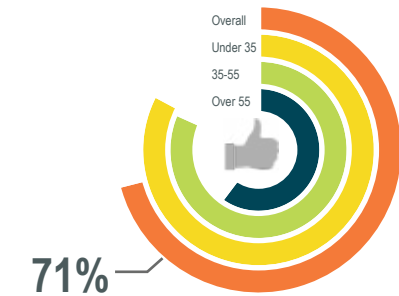


Visual Preference Results



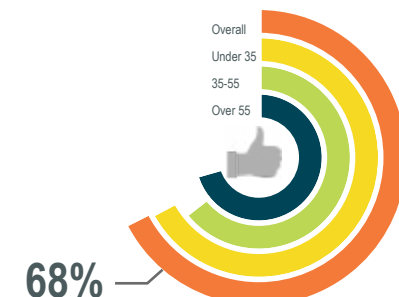
The Sequence
by Arne Quinze

A wooden art installation in Brussels that bridges the gap between the Flemish parliament and the House of Flemish Representatives. The wooden structure engages the buildings on opposing sides while creating a sense of enclosure to the street below. People regularly visit the street and the sculpture to experience how it changes the character of the street and the urban environment.



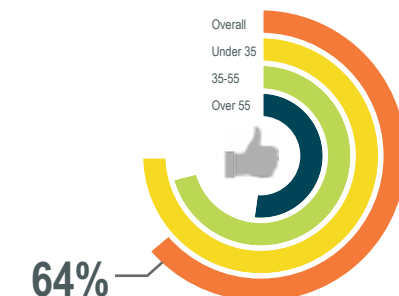
16th Avenue Tiled Stairs
by Aileen Barr and Colette Crutcher

The 163 risers are clad with mosaic tiles that 300 neighbors assisted in creating over a two and a half year period. The sea-to-sky design incorporates 2,000 handmade tiles and over 75,000 fragments of tile. The project was sponsored by the San Francisco Trust and supported by the Golden Gate Heights Neighborhood Association.



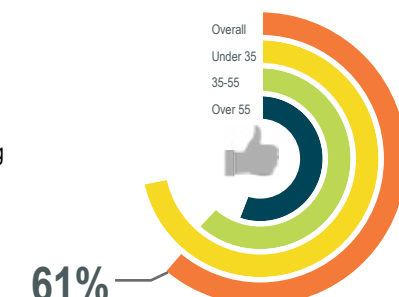
Skies Painted with Unnumbered Sparks
by Janet Echelman

The interactive sculpture was installed at the TED Conference's 30th anniversary in Vancouver, B.C. It spanned 745 feet, and the lighting could be choreographed in real time using physical gestures on participants' mobile devices. The project embodies art and technology and is made of a complex matrix of 145 miles of braided fiber.



Tetris
Tel Aviv City Hall

The Tel Aviv City Hall was outfitted with a 32,000 square foot screen made of 480 LED lights. Two five feet tall joysticks controlled the game of Tetris on the building facade. Other games included *Pong* and *Snake* and was made available for the public to play every Thursday night. The installation was in advance of the DLD Tel Aviv Innovation Festival.



Youth Engagement

Much of the public engagement conducted during the project focused on stakeholders, businesses, and residents of Bellevue. To better understand how the future of Bellevue might use the Grand Connection the City conducted a mini work session with Bellevue's Big Picture High School. This work session provided an opportunity to gain insights from Bellevue's youth and how they experience Downtown Bellevue.

The work session began with a brief presentation, followed by a series of prompting questions related to the students' engagement with Downtown Bellevue and their thoughts on how the Grand Connection can improve the City. This was followed by break out work sessions where students brainstormed ideas. Some of the key ideas that emerged from the work sessions included (ranked by popularity):

- Art
- Food and Food Trucks
- Public Games
- Water Features
- More and Playgrounds
- More Vegetation and Natural Elements

Many of the students' concepts paralleled those of stakeholders and other residents. Additionally the students desired more activities and events that were low or no cost that would encourage them to engage more with Downtown Bellevue.

Following the work sessions with Big Picture School, the City's planning intern, Oliver Tjalve, crafted a survey aimed at soliciting additional responses from Bellevue's High School students. The survey asked questions related to current engagement with

Downtown Bellevue, as well as improvements that the students felt it needed to be more engaging for youth.

Student Survey Responses:

- 42%** Stated there were a lack of things to do in Downtown Bellevue for youth.
- 37%** Stated that activities in Downtown were too expensive for youth.
- 61%** Stated that more activities and more free activities would encourage visits to Downtown.
- 21%** Stated that better pedestrian and cyclist facilities were needed to encourage their visits to Downtown.



▲ Big Picture High School Students sketch and brainstorm their ideas for the Grand Connection

Online Open Houses

To reach the largest audience possible, the City hosted several online open houses to exhibit the work completed during the Grand Connection visioning process. The first online open house focused on elements such as route identity, cohesive design strategies, and public space improvements from Meydenbauer Bay to the Bellevue Transit Center. The second online open house focused on additional public space improvements, alternative transportation and connectivity options, and early concepts for the Interstate 405 crossing. The third online open house for the refined concepts for the Interstate 405 crossing will follow the release of this plan.

Each online open house drew nearly 2,000 views and over 100 public comments. The one question polls were also released simultaneously to capture the open house audience and provide additional feedback. At the end of the visioning process a public open house will be held at Bellevue City Hall and presented to key stakeholder groups and resident associations, along with an abbreviated version of this document.

Sample of public comments received during the online open houses:

- *"I am glad to see the progress of the Grand Connection. It's good to see the city think and act big. We've been a timid sort of town for years that's done things carefully and conservatively...it's encouraging to see the city considering the needs of cyclists, pedestrians, and transit."*
- *"Please add small play areas, especially between the museum and the transit center, and further into Wilburton."*
- *"I think more amenities like this will add a lot of value into Bellevue."*

- *"My hope is that it will increase the amount of green space and art, and provide more shared community areas."*
- *"I think that it is important that the citizens take advantage of the Grand Connection 365 days of the year - rain or shine."*
- *"I am excited to see the development of east/west connections in Bellevue as it is currently not possible to cross I-405 by pedestrians and bikes, cutting our city in two."*
- *"One of the major issues I have always had with the overall area is the lack of native trees throughout the city."*
- *"So glad that the Grand Connection could eventually go to the Botanical Gardens!"*
- *"Currently Downtown Bellevue is outright hostile to pedestrians. When designing a solution for this I would love to see mixed uses not unlike a pedestrian zone in European inner cities."*

Other Engagement

The City engaged in a number of other opportunities to speak with and exhibit work to civic organizations, neighborhood associations, media engagements, and other infrastructure and planning initiatives. These included:

- 425 Business
- Bellevue Chamber of Commerce
- Bellevue Downtown Association
- Business and Economic Forums
- Congress for New Urbanism
- Daily Journal of Commerce
- King 5 News
- Puget Sound Business Journal
- Sound Transit Outreach Events
- Woodridge Neighborhood Association