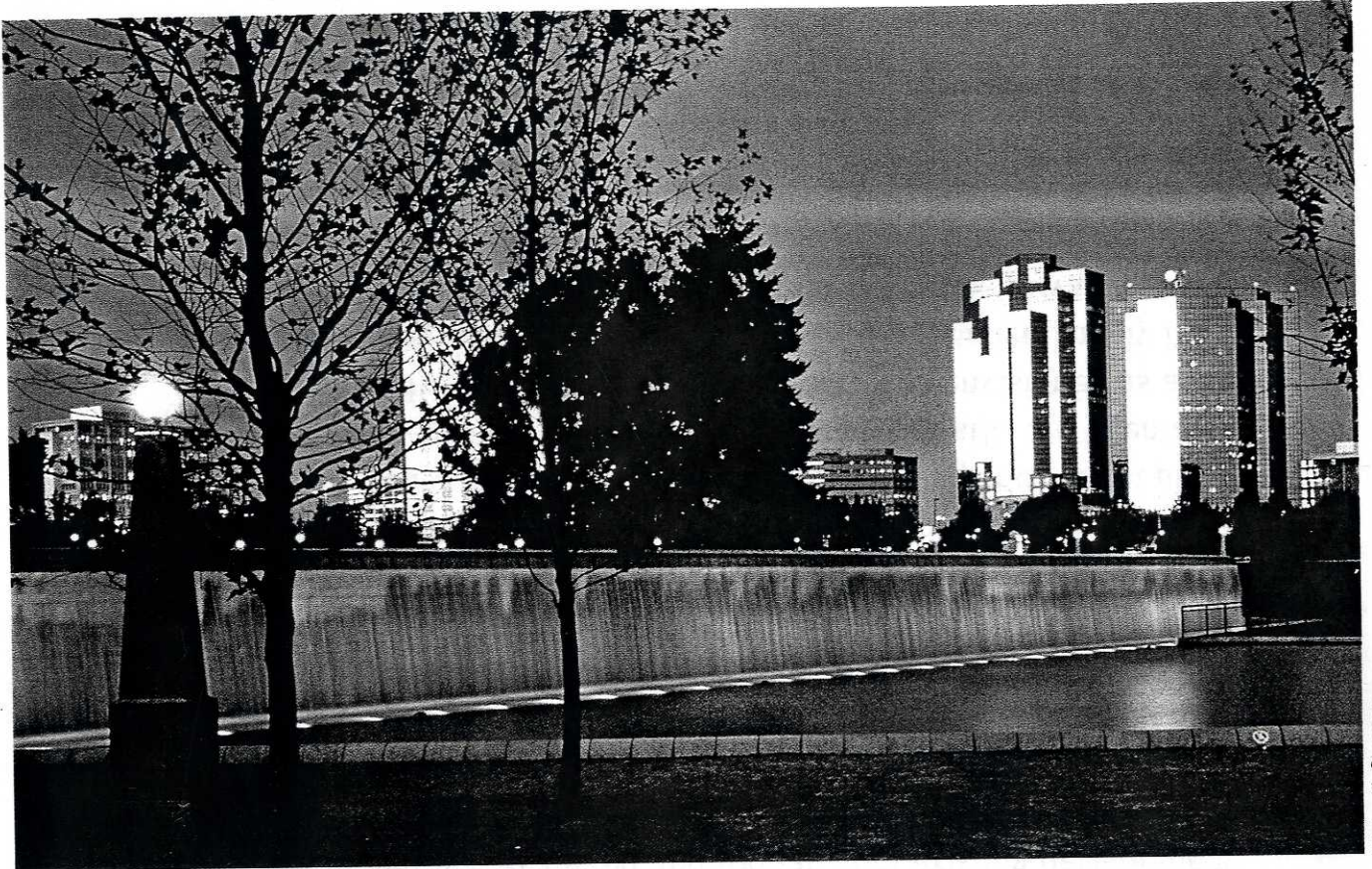

Downtown Park

Bellevue, Washington

Terry Jill Lassar



Michael I. Shupeun

Once the butt of Seattle cocktail-party jokes, downtown Bellevue—known as Car City, and strewn with gas stations, strip malls, sprawling office buildings, asphalt parking lots, and other hallmarks of suburbia—has been working for nearly 20 years to transform itself from a suburban bedroom community into a regional urban center. Located ten miles east of Seattle across Lake Washington, Bellevue offers spectacular views of Mount Rainier, Lake Washington, and the Seattle skyline. With a population of 103,000, the city is the finance, business, and retailing center of the “greater Eastside” suburban expansion.

Work on a new downtown plan started in 1978, and in the early 1980s, Bellevue passed a radically revised land use code to achieve

an intense, compact commercial core. The downtown was totally redefined as a 144-block area where development was to be directed. The edges of the central business district (CBD) were redefined so that high-quality residential neighborhoods could coexist alongside high-density development.¹ The comprehensive plan also contained a strong statement about the need for a 24-hour downtown and a mixed-use urban core where people could live, work, and enjoy cultural and recreational activities.

Today, with 5 million square feet of office space, 4 million square feet of retail/mixed-use development, and some 1,000 housing units, Bellevue is closer to its goal of becoming a true regional center. However, creating a sense of place has proven to be a challenge. The city's street system of large superblocks limits the creation of a pedestrian orientation. In addition, downtown development was scattered and too far from existing development to create the concentration of uses that makes for a dynamic environment.

In response, the city has undertaken a series of planning and development projects to enhance the pedestrian environment and instill a sense of place in the CBD. It also embarked on an ambitious public building program, including a regional library and a convention/performing arts center. But one of the critical elements of the plan was the addition of new downtown parks, urban plazas, and open spaces. In particular, Downtown Park, the "Central Park" of the city's open space network, was envisioned as a pastoral retreat and an organizing element surrounded largely by residential towers. And because of the value the private sector placed on such a park, it took responsibility for financing and building the first phase with the city's oversight.

Seizing the Opportunity

In the early 1980s, the Bellevue School District offered to give the city of Bellevue five acres of land for park development. In exchange, the school district wanted the city to rezone the remaining 12.5 acres, which it envisioned turning into commercial development as a long-term investment. The site, occupied by abandoned school administration buildings and a former junior high school, had been declared surplus property.

Rather than accept the gift of five acres, then-mayor Cary Bozeman pressed to purchase the entire 17.5-acre parcel. According to Bozeman, urban parks, such as Vancouver's Stanley Park and the Boston Common, are key "image setters and are critical to shaping the quality of urban living. Cities have a responsibility as they grow denser to provide open spaces as a way to sustain the quality of urban living."

In 1983, the city purchased the initial 17.5-acre site for \$14.3 million—the largest sum paid for a municipal park site in the state's history. The purchase was financed through councilmanic bonds backed by a 0.2 percent increase in the local option sales tax.

Controversy surrounded the park acquisition from the start. Citing the high price paid for the land, critics claimed that the city was catering to its business and development interests at the general public's expense. Some thought that such a large expenditure should have been put to a public vote. Others questioned whether the site, on the western fringe of the CBD, was the best location for a "central" park, even though the former site of the junior high school had been noted as a "special-opportunity site" in the city's 1979 downtown plan, and open space had been identified as one of the options for that site.

Despite criticism, Bozeman wanted to seize the opportunity to create an ambitious central park for the city. "Every once in a while," said Bozeman, "as an elected official, you have an opportunity to do one of these visionary things where you're not sure you have the

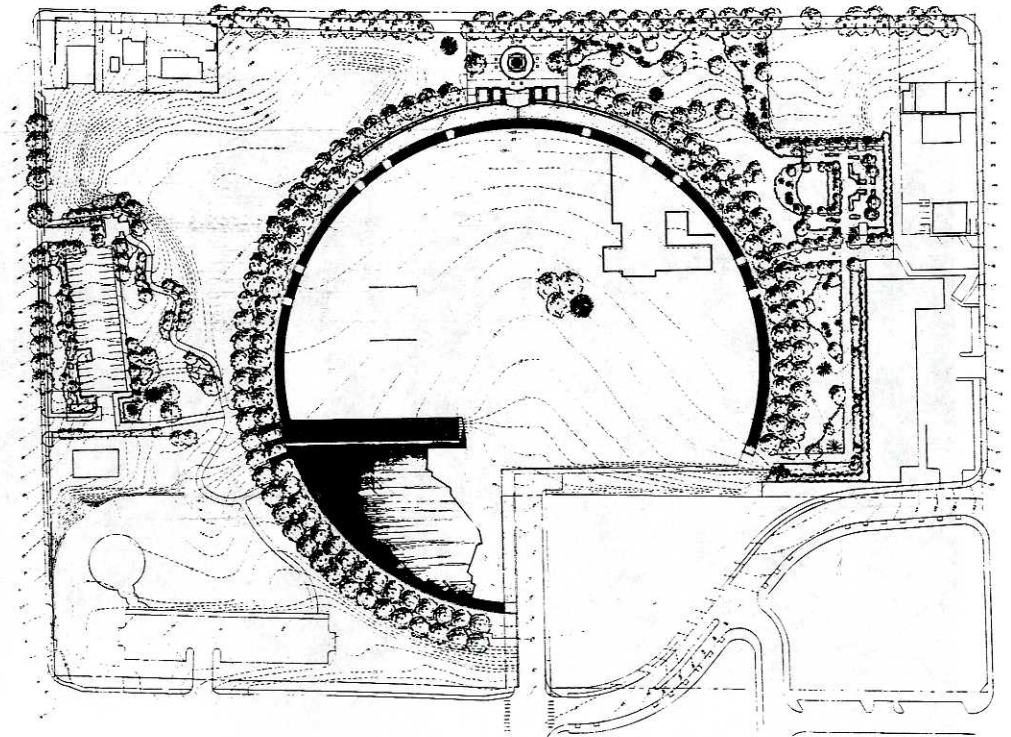
public support, but you know in your heart it's the right thing to do."

Although Bozeman envisioned a dense residential neighborhood growing up around the edges of the park, downtown Bellevue in 1983 was mainly an office core that was deserted after five p.m. "The park," said Bozeman, "would not realize its full potential to serve the public for another 15 or 20 years. But if you waited until then, when you had those densities, it would be too expensive to acquire the land."

Designing a Suburban Central Park

Downtown Park, a two-block area of 20 acres, is located several blocks west of the office core and immediately south of Bellevue Square, a 50-year-old regional shopping mall that is probably the city's best-known landmark. Today, the now-20-acre Downtown Park is the crown jewel in the emerald necklace of the city's park system. The park's bold circle-within-a-square design includes a large, grassy meadow encircled by a canal and a tree-lined walkway. The canal is about 1,200 feet long; water spills over a series of small waterfalls and cascades into a shallow, one-acre pond in the park's southwest quadrant. The 20-foot-wide promenade is lined with London plane trees that will reach a height of 80 feet. Light standards in the classic shape of obelisks also line the promenade; designed to demarcate the circular area, the lights create an immediate sense of place.

The park's bold circle-within-a-square design includes a large grassy meadow encircled by a canal and tree-lined walkway.



In contrast to most of Bellevue's more naturalistic recreational parks, Downtown Park looks to French 17th-century landscape designs where open spaces were arranged in a more formal, geometric composition and where hard surfaces and objects were used to frame space. At the north entryway to the park, a belvedere—a raised platform that can be used as a performance stage—affords dramatic vistas of the entire park.



Adrienne Teleki

At the northern entrance to the park, a belvedere—a raised platform—provides visitors with a dramatic vista of the entire park. The east entrance leads from a busy street toward a grove of elms that serves as a memorial to three local soldiers who died in World War I. Low walls mark the foundations of original buildings on the site and provide seating for picnickers and concert-goers.

The city set ambitious goals for the park. Like New York's Central Park, Downtown Park was conceived as a haven, a place where people who live and work in the CBD can take respite from an intensely urban environment. The city also envisioned the park as a natural destination to which people would walk to attend concerts, outdoor theater, and community events.

City staff viewed the park as a way to improve the city's pedestrian circulation system—thus supporting the city's land use code, which was revised in the early 1980s to encourage a more pedestrian-friendly downtown environment. The park was also intended to provide a transition between adjacent retail areas, multi-family housing, and high-rise commercial office towers. Finally, city officials and planners aspired to create a signature park that would help forge a new identity for the downtown as a distinctly urban place. Up to this time, Bellevue was best known as the home of the Bellevue Square regional shopping mall.

The Design Competition

To muster political and financial support and provide direction for the park's development, Bozeman created

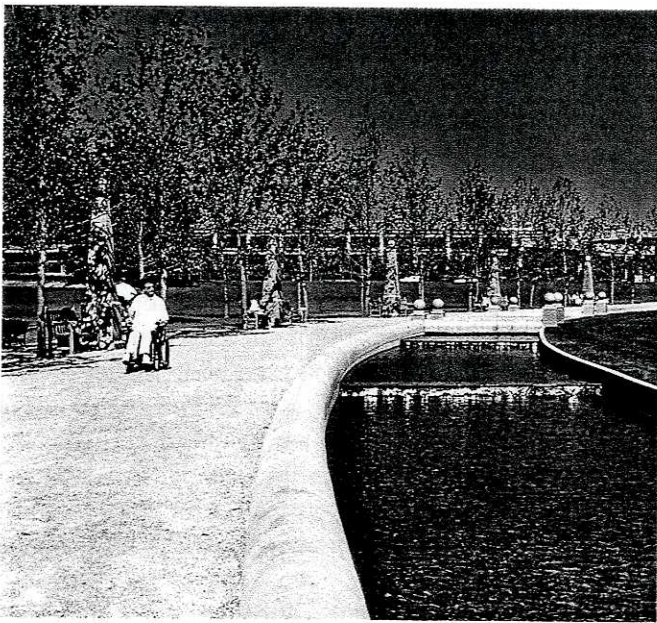
the 28-member Downtown Park Citizens Committee, which represented a broad spectrum of civic and business interests. One of the committee's first recommendations was that the city hold an international design competition to generate enthusiasm for the project.

The program for the competition was based on the results of a survey asking 55,000 households and businesses what they wanted to see in a downtown central park. Most of the 5,000 respondents asked for a passive, open greenspace where they could sit and read, eat lunch, or just people-watch.

The park committee raised \$140,000 from businesses and private sources to fund most of the competition. The city elected to finance the \$30,000 required to conduct the survey and to acquire professional assistance to set up the competition process. The cost of \$170,000 for the survey and competition represented about 3.5 percent of the total cost of designing and constructing the first phase of the park.

A total of 67 participants, each of whom paid \$100 to enter the competition, submitted entries to be judged by a jury of design professionals and lay people. At the recommendation of competition consultant Edward Wundram, Vincent Scully, then Sterling Professor of Art and Architecture History at Yale University, served as jury adviser.

The first stage of the competition limited the contestants to a proposal for the city's 17.5 acres. The three winners of the first stage were then asked to make recommendations for a master plan. In December 1984, the jury recommended the concept submitted by Beckley/



Michael I. Shopeun

The wide promenade is lined with London plane trees that will reach a height of 80 feet. Light standards in the classic shape of obelisks line the promenade. The hardscape that is used throughout the park holds up better under heavy use than softer lawn surfaces. The crushed granite paths do not rut as much as some other materials and are thus easier for handicapped people to use.

Myers, a Milwaukee-based architecture firm that had worked largely in urban locations. After city staff completed an environmental impact statement on the three final designs, the city council voted in April 1985 to accept the jury's recommendation.

Although there was surprise that the winning team was an out-of-town architecture firm rather than a local landscape architecture firm, the simple, bold form of the winning design lived up to Bellevue's hope of creating a park that would serve as a strong identifying image for the city.² Beckley/Myers teamed with a local landscape architecture firm, MacLeod Reckord, for input on some technical design issues, such as selection of vegetation and construction materials.

The design competition was an important element of the entire development process. It helped Bellevue's image by showing that the city had come of age as an urban center. (Indeed, the covers of Eastside telephone books now feature Downtown Park instead of the Bellevue Square shopping center.) It helped the city and the public visualize in precise physical terms their long-term aspirations for park development. All entries were displayed at public places throughout the city, and citizens were encouraged to comment by filling out cards. And to some extent, the competition protected the design selection process from political compromise.

The Beckley/Myers design draws from a landscape tradition rarely seen in the Northwest. For the most part, Seattle-area parks are influenced by English country garden design, which emphasizes a natural, informal look. By contrast, Downtown Park looks to the work of André Le Notre and other 17th-century French landscape designers, who arranged open spaces in more formal, geometric compositions and used objects and hard surfaces to frame space. In the Beckley/Myers design, it was the powerful geometry and sheer simplicity of the circle as the main unifying form that ultimately won over the jury.

Today at the park, the circular canal drops down a few inches at regular intervals to match the slope of the land. The canal is ringed by a wide path of crushed granite (like that used in Parisian parks), which is in turn ringed by a circle of plane trees that alternate with obelisk-shaped light fixtures. Within this series of concentric circles lies an open meadow with a slightly off-center cluster of trees. Sherrill Myers, who worked in Europe for many years, also looked to the works of the French Impressionists to imbue this urban oasis with a spirit of tranquility and calm.

As is the case with most urban parks, safety was a concern. Myers initially wanted to strengthen the edges of the park by creating a series of small enclosures on the periphery, an approach that was abandoned on the advice of the police department. To encourage extensive use by women and children, the spaces needed to be open, relatively free of shrubs, and with unobstructed horizontal sight lines.

Easy-to-maintain vegetation and materials help to control maintenance costs in the park. For example, the hardscape used throughout the park holds up better under heavy traffic than do softer lawn surfaces. Crushed granite does not rut as much as some other materials and thus provides a stable surface for wheelchairs. In addition, granite is relatively porous, minimizing the need for detention facilities for runoff. London plane trees were selected for their durability: if they are vandalized, their exfoliating bark grows back. Also, because the leaves are large and tend not to decay in water, they do not easily clog the water features of the park.

Private Contributions for the Public Good

The Bellevue Downtown Park project was financed and developed through a public/private partnership approach that involved close cooperation among city government, business leaders, and elected officials. The estimated cost for developing the park was \$4 million. The city had purchased the site with councilmanic bonds, but

in late 1984, a \$2 million general-obligation bond issue for park development lost by a 0.4 percent margin. A coalition of Bellevue's civic and business leaders then formed a nonprofit organization to lease the site from the city for \$1 per year. The nonprofit group launched a fundraising drive to raise \$1.8 million for development of the park's first phase—about one-third of the project (mainly the eastern section), including construction of two-thirds of the belvedere and nearly half the canal. Once Phase I was completed, the improved site was returned to the city for maintenance and operation. At that point, citizens voted to use public bonds to fund the second development phase.

Part of the success of the fundraising drive was attributed to the strategy of creating a private entity to develop and construct the first development phase. Many private contributors, particularly in the city's corporate and business segments, believed that their dollars would be better spent and more efficiently managed by a private entity than by a public one. This arrangement helped dispel the belief that the public sector ought to be financing this public project.

The fundraising drive, led by John Ellis, then president of a Bellevue-based utility company, set a target of \$1.8 million in private contributions. A main strategy was to solicit contributions of \$30,000 to \$125,000 from major corporations including Boeing, Pac Car, Rainier Bank, and Puget Sound Power and Light Company. A second major funding source was smaller businesses and corporations located in Bellevue, whose contributions ranged from \$1,000 to \$30,000. Major individual donors contributed between \$1,000 and \$50,000 apiece, and some 2,000 individual donors contributed anywhere from \$5 to \$1,000 (see Figure 1).

While more than 2,000 businesses and individuals contributed to the campaign, the major corporate donors provided the lion's share; their generosity was fueled, in part, by awareness that the park would provide an important amenity for Bellevue's rapidly burgeoning CBD. The announcement of several significant donations from large corporations jump-started the campaign. After the largest corporations had established a contribution ceiling, a subcommittee of influential business people systematically canvassed the business community. Once the bank with the largest asset base had contributed, say, \$100,000, other banks were approached to contribute an amount proportional to their share of the market.

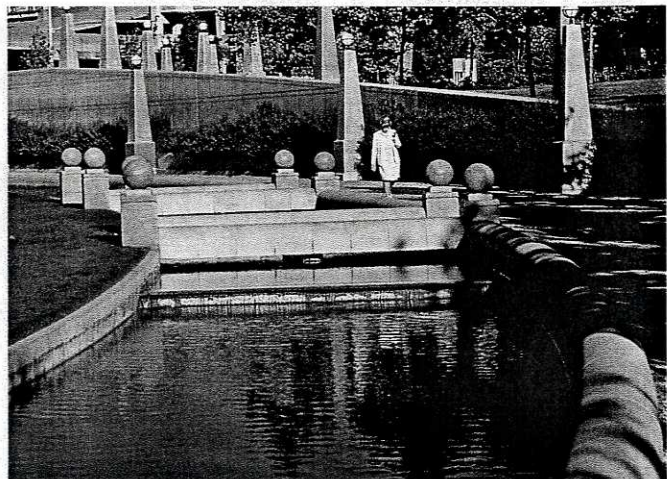
An additional fundraising tactic was to inscribe the names of all donors contributing \$100 or more on a granite monument located in the belvedere at the north entry to the park. The monument was the main "hook" in a direct mail brochure and in newspaper solicitations.

A public-relations firm created a series of radio, television, and newspaper advertisements and televised public service announcements. An advantage of these media bursts—apart from the money they generated—was that they represented a level of sophistication and credibility not generally associated with public sector marketing programs. According to Lee Springgate, director of Bellevue Parks and Community Services Department, "There is no question in our minds that a private public-relations firm is in a much better position to churn out professional, state-of-the-art products. Public agencies are all too frequently constrained by low budgets, limited expertise, and the realities of political life."³

Additional marketing endeavors included a five-minute video, feature stories, direct mailings, special events, displays, promotional breakfasts, service-club appeals, and associated merchandising. Because of these efforts, Downtown Park received much greater exposure and recognition than any of the city's other parks.

Development and Construction

For the first phase of development, a public oversight committee—which included the city manager, the park director, a park board member, the mayor pro tem, and representatives of the private nonprofit group—was created to hire the architect, review and approve drawings and specifications, and monitor construction. The private corporation complied with all applicable federal, state, and local laws; secured insurance coverage; and obtained the required permits. It was also bound by the terms of the lease to construct the park according to the master plan approved by the city council. The lease terms required the corporation to submit monthly status reports



Water spills over a series of small waterfalls and cascades into a shallow pond in the park's southwest quadrant.

Michael I. Shopeun

to the city, which had the right to suspend work that did not meet with approved plans and specifications.

Fundraising was on an almost parallel track with construction. This pay-as-you-go approach was politically expedient in that beginning work immediately demonstrated visible progress and assured the community that the park would become a reality. This strategy also lent a sense of urgency to fundraising efforts and left no doubt in contributors' minds about how the money would be spent. However, it also raised some concerns: mainly, that the city might inherit a partially finished site and would then have to use public funds to protect it from deteriorating.

A disadvantage of the pay-as-you-go approach was that some construction had to be delayed to enable the fundraisers to keep pace, thus extending the construction schedule from nine to 18 months. Delay also created a number of construction glitches, making it difficult to purchase supplies ahead of time and to coordinate the work of subcontractors.

Unlike Phase I, which was built by the private sector, Phase II was paid for exclusively with public funds. Public satisfaction with Phase I paved the way for 70 percent approval of a 1988 park bond, which included \$3 million for the second phase of development for the park. Phase II included completion of the western half of the canal, meadow, and promenade; construction of the waterfall and pond; and completion of the belvedere. Phase I was completed in the fall of 1987, and Phase II in September 1990.

The city had far greater control over the development and construction of Phase II. The lease agreement under Phase I, specifying roles, responsibilities, and consequences for both the public and private partici-

pants, substantially curtailed the administrative control of the Bellevue Parks and Community Services Department and removed its authority over certain construction decisions. Richard VanDeMark, who managed the park development for the city, noted that jurisdictions considering using a similar public/private approach for park development should be prepared to deal with the delicate situations that may arise when the public partner does not control the purse strings.

Downtown Park Spurs Additional Park Development

When public interest generated by Downtown Park translated into an unprecedented level of financial and political support for other park projects, no one was more surprised than Lee Springgate, who had anticipated that the downtown park would be a "zero sum game where investment in the downtown park meant less money for parks elsewhere in the city." Between 1984 and 1990, \$84 million was authorized for acquisition, development, and renovation of other parks.

The public/private partnering approach, which was first used for Downtown Park, is now de rigueur for park development in Bellevue. For example, in the case of the 100-acre Wilburton Park, home to the Bellevue Botanical Garden, Springgate forged a financial partnership with the Bellevue Botanical Garden Society to raise private contributions for park development and maintenance. He has also worked with the city's historical society to help raise funds to renovate a home in the Mercer Slough, an area that is now preserved as wetlands and a large green open space. Springgate believes that when public entities team up with private partners, they need to be willing to alter routine decision making and implementation processes. "When you have a partner and you ask them to help achieve a goal," said Springgate, "you have to give them some authority. That's part of the deal. You can't ask people to give financial and political support and then expect it to be done exactly the way you want. Not everything with Downtown Park went exactly the way we planned. But without our private partners, the park would not have been built."

Completing Downtown Park

Since 1990, the city has gradually acquired additional parcels of the 600-square-foot superblock to add to the park site, which now totals some 20 acres, including several parcels on the southeast corner of the park that were necessary to complete the original circle design. Against the staff's advice, the city council originally resisted spending more money on the park, but when

Figure 1 • Sources of Funds

	Amount	Percentage
Private contributions for Phase I	\$1,700,000	6.0%
General CIP revenue		
Councilmanic bonds	14,388,000	48.0
Debt service	7,108,000	24.0
Other	1,460,000	5.0
1988 bond issue	3,450,000	11.0
Land purchase revolving fund	600,000	2.0
Rental revenue	423,000	1.0
1984 bond interest earnings	360,000	1.0
Forward thrust bond interest	170,000	0.5
Private contributions	145,000	0.5
Miscellaneous revenue sources	42,000	1.0
Total revenue sources	\$29,846,000	100.0%

a developer secured an option in 1995 to purchase one of the parcels to build a residential project, political pressure mounted for the city to buy out the option, and it ultimately did.

Skyrocketing land values have been the principal challenge to additional land acquisitions. Since the park site was purchased in 1983, costs in the immediate vicinity have about doubled.

Parking and Other Issues

Downtown Park has about 100 dedicated parking spaces, and parking has been controversial from the start. Although the intention was that the primary users—downtown residents and workers—would walk to the park, the reality is that many people drive to the park, and additional parking is needed. Because Downtown Park is adjacent to Bellevue Square, which provides acres of free parking for shoppers, the management of the shopping center has been concerned that park users would occupy parking spaces intended for shopping center patrons.

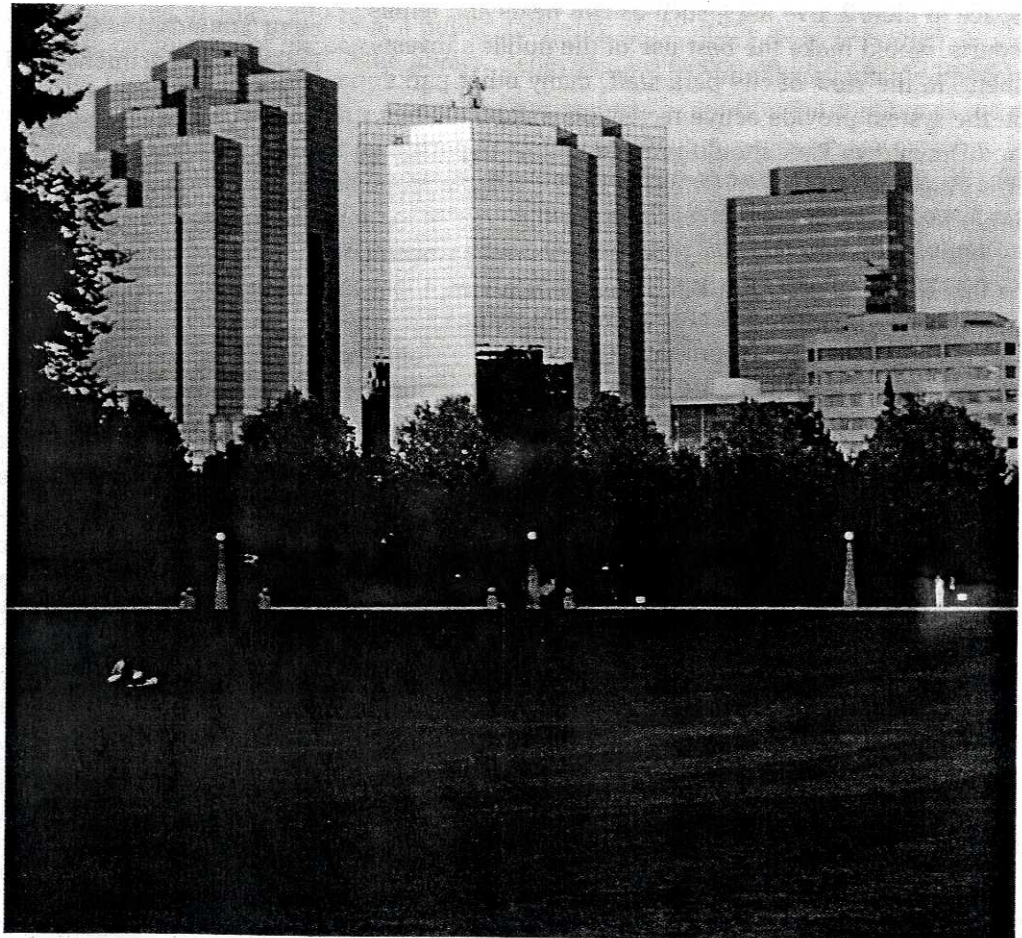
One proposal to increase available parking is to build a municipal garage beneath the park, which might be

shared by the Bellevue Art Museum, currently tucked away on the top floor of Bellevue Square. The museum is considering the park as one of three potential sites for its future home. Retailers located on Bellevue's Main Street, a block south of the park, would also welcome additional parking for their customers. Because it has a major grade difference, which could lessen excavation costs, the southwest corner of the park may be a good location for a garage. However, this spot is now occupied by an intensively used temporary children's playground, which would need to be moved elsewhere in the park.

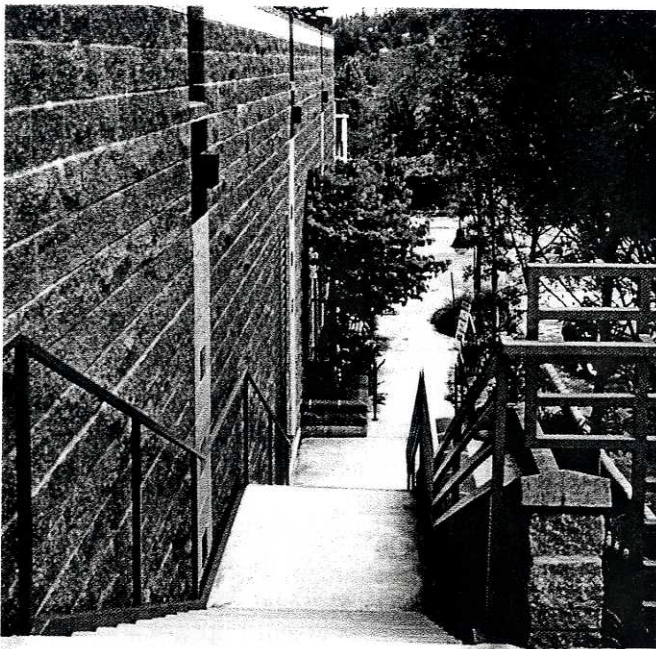
Downtown Park was always envisioned as a city park designed for passive recreational uses, not as a regional facility. Programming is deliberately low key; public events include the Fourth of July celebration, Shakespeare in the Grass, and a series of children's concerts. (One reason for downplaying public events that would draw large crowds was to assure Bellevue Square owner Kemper Freeman that mall parking spaces would not be usurped by park patrons.)

Whether or not to include active recreational activities at the park is still being debated. Although the original citizen survey showed a strong preference for a passive "green oasis" to offset Bellevue's increasingly urban

The city of Bellevue wanted to create a tranquil green oasis like New York's Central Park, where people who live and work in the CBD can take respite from an intensely urban environment.



Adrienne Teleki



Terry Jill Lassar

The city's land use code required developers to build a through-block pedestrian connection to strengthen links between Main Street, in "Old Bellevue," and the park.

character, some residents believe that converting the space to more active uses, such as ball fields and tennis courts, would make the best use of the public's investment. In the view of city park staff, many other parks in the system provide active recreational opportunities, and Downtown Park should provide unique opportunities instead of duplicating those already available at other locations.

Downtown Park was designed to serve office workers in the CBD and residents in the high-density housing planned nearby. Although some new multifamily housing has been built adjacent to the park, the neighborhood is still in the embryonic stage. Since most future park users—neighborhood residents—have not yet arrived, a conundrum emerges: how does the city simultaneously plan and design a park for the future and maximize public investment to meet present needs?

To address these and other park development issues, a task force was organized to make recommendations to the city council regarding the update of the master plan for Downtown Park. Some of the issues being considered by the task force include the following:

- Identifying a location for a permanent children's play area;
- Developing an amphitheater, as originally planned, which would bring a new dimension of entertainment to the park—dance, opera, classical music performances, and live theater;

- Freezing the pond for ice skating during the winter months;
- Setting permanent park boundaries and clearly delineating future parcels for public acquisition (to give more security to owners of adjacent property);
- Completing the original circle design;
- Improving the design of entryways from the south and northeast corners.

Using the Park to Spur Residential Development

The strategy of developing parks and open spaces in downtown Bellevue was part of the city's overall effort to create a more lively pedestrian environment, which would in turn enhance the market for multifamily development and draw a residential population to the city. The strategy is slowly working: the two principal residential neighborhoods now developing in downtown Bellevue are both adjacent to parks or urban open spaces. To capitalize on the cachet of a park address, several developers have incorporated the word *park* into the names of their developments—Parkridge and Parkside, for example.

"I strongly believe that the development of Downtown Park was a catalyst for the residential development around it," said Matthew Terry, director of the Bellevue Department of Community Development. Developers confirmed this view. One property owner said that the close proximity of Downtown Park to his parcel was critical to his decision to buy the land. When Levin Lynch bought his parcel in 1980, he thought he was lucky to be close to a major regional shopping mall. Then when Downtown Park was developed next to his site, "that was like winning a lotto ticket," said Lynch. "It's a blue-ribbon location to be next to a regional mall and a park."

Many of the residents in Bellevue's recent urban developments are empty nesters. Instead of doing yard work, these people want to exercise by jogging in the park or walking their dogs there. Robert Wallace, managing partner of Wallace Properties Group, says that it is the pastoral character of Downtown Park that makes it a valuable amenity. The park's value in relation to residential development would diminish, according to Wallace, if ball fields and more active uses were introduced.

Housing in Bellevue's CBD

In 1994, when a 24-story, mixed-use residential development opened, it was the first high-rise condominium built in the city's CBD. That same year, a 97-unit condominium development opened on the

south edge of Downtown Park. Several apartments and condominium projects were also built next to the new multistory regional library. But the market for urban housing in Bellevue is a recent phenomenon. Until the early 1990s, there had been no residential growth in the downtown for some 20 years. As Matthew Terry noted, the demand for urban housing was untested, so lending institutions viewed the downtown as a risky investment. Moreover, during the mid-1980s, overwhelming pressure for office and retail development virtually squeezed out opportunities for residential growth. Finally, said Terry, "there was a lack of amenities that would create the kind of character to make residential development successful."

To make up for this lack, the city invested in a host of public improvements and amenities in the downtown, specifically with an eye toward residential development—parks, open spaces, cultural facilities, and pedestrian improvements. These include the 400-seat Meydenbauer Convention Center, new parks and public plazas, the Metro Transit Center, and the Bellevue Regional Library. The private sector has also invested in amenities that support residential growth, including a 100,000-volume bookstore, a doll museum, a major hardware store, a supermarket, drugstores, banks, and boutiques, not to mention a spate of restaurants with international cuisine. However, amenities such as movie theaters, which generate nighttime activity, are still lacking, although mall owner Kemper Freeman is seeking permits to construct a multiplex theater northwest of Bellevue Square.

The first new housing development, the McKee/Parkside, which borders the south edge of Downtown Park, opened in March 1994 and sold out almost immediately. The mostly two-bedroom luxury homes face Main Street in "Old Bellevue," with views of Meydenbauer Bay on Lake Washington to the west. Parkside, the second phase of the project, faces NE 1st Street and looks directly onto Downtown Park. Units in this second phase are larger and significantly more expensive. The five-story, wood-frame structure, with two levels of below-grade parking, contains 97 units at a density of about 80 units to the acre.

Intracorp's McKee/Parkside development represents the urbane, high-quality development that city planners had always envisioned for the park's edge. Local developers are encouraged by the quick sellout of the Intracorp project. Intracorp's strategy was to persuade potential buyers that the concentration of nearby urban amenities justified a major change in lifestyle. Many of the residents had left large, single-family homes in the Eastside suburbs. Downtown Park, an old-fashioned Main Street, as well as restaurants, specialty boutiques, and a regional shopping mall—all within walking distance

—were some of the urban amenities that Intracorp actively marketed.

The other main residential neighborhood in the CBD is located in the northeast quadrant, in the vicinity of the Bellevue Regional Library and Ashwood Park. The city persuaded the library district to jointly purchase the ten-acre site, part of which would be used for the new regional library; the remaining four acres—Ashwood Park—have not yet been developed and are now used mainly as a soccer and baseball field.

The regional library has acted as a magnet for residential development. Su Development Corporation built Park Place, a six-story luxury condominium project, across from the library. The ground floor retail space, occupied by a deli and a hair salon, sold out almost immediately. The development attracted mostly older residents, between 55 and 70 years old. The same developer is building another for-sale project two blocks away and is considering developing a rental project one block south of Ashwood Park. President John Su notes that the library and park are highly desirable amenities for his developments. Many prospective buyers tell him that the attractive appearance and high-quality design of the library building also drew them to this location.

The city recently completed construction of Ashwood Plaza, which features several major art pieces and serves as a public gathering space at the southeast entry to the library. Bellevue's insistence on high-caliber design



Michael J. Shopeun

The park has become a popular spot for walkers and joggers.



The park was a catalyst for residential development such as the McKee/Parkside on the south edge of the park. The five-story, wood-frame building above a podium garage is becoming the model for residential development in the area.

for its public places has helped raise the design threshold for private development.

SECO Development is also building several residential projects in the same area. Parkridge apartments, located next to Park Place, is targeted to a broad range of renters. President Michael Christ is proceeding with several additional mixed-use developments nearby, including two projects that will cater to seniors. Christ notes that seniors already living in the area enjoy walking to Ashwood Park and watching the baseball or soccer games. This park, along with the nearby community and cultural facilities—the library, the doll museum, and the performing arts center—is an important part of the nexus of activity that is drawing seniors to this part of town.

To better connect these different facilities, the city invested in a variety of pedestrian improvements, including sidewalks and street trees. The city also created a local improvement district (LID) for NE 10th that runs on the south side of the library and park. The LID paid for landscaping improvements, wider sidewalks, and a midblock pedestrian connection. Michael Christ emphasized that “good pedestrian streets, where traffic is slowed to no more than 25 to 30 miles an hour, are essential to the success” of his residential developments. The older residents he is targeting for his current projects want an environment where they can walk safely and cross the streets comfortably.

Linkages to Other City Parks

Downtown Park is a focal point for the city’s Olmsted-inspired park system, which includes 2,000 acres of parks and open space connected by the Lake-to-Lake

Trail and Greenway, which extends from Lake Washington to Lake Sammamish. Fifty years after Frederick Law Olmsted designed New York City’s Central Park, the city of Seattle commissioned his son and stepson to design a network of open spaces. The Olmsteds envisioned a system of parks, greenbelts, and boulevards wrapping east all the way around Lake Washington. They likened the greenway to a string of jewels in an emerald necklace, where parks and open spaces would be visually and functionally interconnected.

Eight decades later, a number of Eastside parks and open spaces carry out the Olmsteds’ vision. Much of the greenway has been completed in Bellevue with uniform directional signage and pedestrian amenities. Meydenbauer Beach Park, to the west, connects to Downtown Park via a street and walkway system. Downtown Park will also connect with the nearby marina, which the city purchased in 1985.

Notes

1. See Terry Jill Lassar, *Carrots & Sticks: New Zoning Downtown* (Washington, D.C.: ULI—the Urban Land Institute, 1989), 124–127, 148–152, for discussions of the Bellevue downtown plan and land use program.
2. The Beckley/Meyers proposal was also the only one to call for the acquisition of three additional acres to complete the two-block area containing the 17.5 acres.
3. A primary source of information and commentary for this report was Lee Springgate, “Public/Private Park Development: A Case Study” (paper presented to the National Recreation and Park Association, New Orleans, September 1987).



Bellevue Regional Library has been a popular amenity for residents. Ashwood Plaza, at the southeast entry, was one of several public improvements made by the city to enhance the pedestrian environment and provide public gathering spaces.

Project Data • Downtown Park

Development Schedule

Initial site acquired	December 1983
Planning started	August 1983
Design competition conducted	July 1984
Master plan approved	April 1985
Construction started (Phase I)	August 1986
Construction completed (Phase I)	September 1987
Construction started (Phase II)	September 1989
Construction completed (Phase II)	September 1990
Park opened (Phase II)	September 1990
Project completed	Ongoing

Financing Information

Funding Source	Amount	Percentage of Total
Private	\$1,766,000	6%
Local	28,234,000	94
Total	\$30,000,000	100%

Development Cost Information

Site acquisition cost	\$23,618,000
Site improvement costs	
Excavation/demolition	\$942,000
Grading	1,092,000
Utilities	1,013,721
Paving	90,000
Curbs/sidewalks	124,700
Landscaping	251,650
Fees/general conditions	211,300
Concrete	1,114,700
Other	462,662
Total site improvement costs	\$5,302,733
Construction costs (buildings)	
Structure	\$300,000
Heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC)	5,000
Electrical	75,000
Plumbing/sprinklers	5,600
Fees	NA ¹
Total construction costs	\$385,600
Soft costs	
Architecture	\$17,500
Landscape architecture	241,798
Engineering	76,810
Project management	284,777
Marketing	NA
Other (taxes)	441,360
Total soft costs	\$1,062,245
Total site acquisition and development costs	\$30,368,578

Construction and Operating Costs

Amenity	Construction Cost	Operating Cost
Streetscapes	\$160,000	\$15,000
Parking lot landscaping	43,000	8,000
Parking	180,000	10,000
Signage	5,000	500
Plantings		
(foundations, specimens, gardens)	208,650	108,000
Water features	1,013,721	100,000
Entrances	490,000	16,000
Land engineering (e.g., contouring)	1,092,000	NA
Furniture	58,000	4,000
Plazas		12,000
Hardscape features	500,000	13,000
Environmental features	35,000	NA
Lighting (decorative/safety)	48,000	2,200
Special plantings (annual flowers)	0	4,300
Other park amenities	1,169,362	50,000
Rest rooms	300,000	12,000
Total	\$5,302,733	\$355,000

Operating Information

Annual operating expenses	
Taxes	NA
Insurance	NA
Repair and maintenance	\$250,000
Management	10,000
Utilities	100,000
Total operating expenses	\$360,000
Annual gross revenues	
Special event rentals	(\$5,000)
Total	\$355,000

Note

1. Not applicable.