



Vishal Bhargava Urbanist Questionnaire 2025

Bellevue City Council, Position 1

What are your top three priorities to achieve in your term?

My top priorities are housing affordability, sustainable growth, and community safety. Housing affordability means ensuring people of all incomes can live in Bellevue without fear of displacement. This requires zoning reform and incentivizing affordable housing development across the city. Sustainable growth is about balancing Bellevue's rapid development with environmental protection, focusing on transit-oriented neighborhoods that reduce reliance on cars, cut emissions, and preserve green space. Community safety means expanding mental health crisis response teams, investing in youth programs, and fostering trust between residents and law enforcement. These priorities are connected. When housing is affordable, growth is sustainable, and safety is rooted in prevention, we create a stronger, more resilient city that works for everyone.

How will you boost housing options, particularly for families of all incomes to live where they work? How will you engage the public for new shelters, transitional housing, emergency housing, permanent supportive housing? How do you weigh community objections with the housing goals for your jurisdiction, while encouraging engagement from neighbors?

Bellevue needs more housing, and that means adding density where it makes the most sense: near jobs, schools, and transit. During my time on the Planning Commission and on City Council, I've pushed hard for zoning changes that allow for diverse housing types, from duplexes and triplexes to mid-rise apartments, while ensuring developments include affordable units. For shelters and supportive



housing, public engagement is critical, and it must be paired with leadership that is clear about our housing goals. I believe in early, transparent outreach, sharing data on how these facilities benefit communities, and addressing concerns through thoughtful design and operations. Community objections should be heard, but they cannot override the urgent need for housing. By treating residents as partners, inviting dialogue rather than confrontation, we can build trust and move forward on projects that meet both immediate needs and long-term housing stability.

Do you support adding progressive revenue sources? Which ones would you support to fund your priorities? Or what cuts would you make to balance budgets facing increasing strain under Trump?

Yes, I support progressive revenue sources to fund priorities like affordable housing, transit, and climate resilience. Bellevue's economy is strong, but we should not rely solely on regressive taxes that disproportionately impact working families. I have already supported developer impact fees dedicated to affordable housing and green infrastructure. I would be supportive of well-calibrated property taxes and other progressive tax structures. These tools allow us to invest in the services and infrastructure that make Bellevue livable without pushing the financial burden onto those least able to pay. If revenue options are limited, I would look for budget efficiencies but would not cut essential services. We must be proactive in planning for fiscal stability, especially with more negative impacts the Trump administration will likely bring from the federal level. Bellevue should work regionally with other cities to advocate for progressive revenue authority so cities can maintain critical services while meeting growth and climate goals.

What do you think is the most important strategy your jurisdiction can pursue to limit cost increases and make the region affordable to live in? How would you go about implementing that strategy?



The most impactful strategy is expanding housing supply through upzoning near mass transit and allowing more diverse housing types citywide. We already have the 2 Line running, and soon we will be connected with Seattle over the I90 bridge. Bellevue's current zoning heavily favors single-family homes, which drives up costs and limits options for families, seniors, and workers. By legalizing missing middle housing, eliminating parking mandates, and streamlining permitting, we can bring more homes to market faster and at lower cost. This should be paired with inclusionary zoning to ensure new developments contribute to affordability, and with incentives for green, sustainable building. I would work to integrate housing planning with transportation and climate goals so residents can live near where they work and rely less on cars. Implementation means building consensus among stakeholders, engaging residents with clear data on the benefits, and ensuring infrastructure such as schools, parks, and transit keeps pace with growth. Affordability is not just about prices; it is about access, opportunity, and stability for all residents.

Traffic deaths are rising across Washington state, with pedestrians composing an increasing share statewide. What is your approach to making our streets safer for all users?

Bellevue must better implement its Vision Zero approach to eliminate traffic fatalities and serious injuries. This starts with designing safer streets that prioritize people over cars. As a Planning Commissioner and as a Council Member I've been vocal about supporting expanding pedestrian walkways, improving crosswalk visibility, lowering speed limits in high-injury corridors, and redesigning dangerous intersections. When the Council was voting on Wilburton, I was the loudest advocate for expanding sidewalks to allow for ped+bike usage despite being in the minority. We must also invest in traffic calming measures, better street lighting, and signal timing that gives pedestrians a head start. Public transit improvements can reduce car dependence,



which also lowers collision risk. Enforcement has a role, but infrastructure changes are more effective in the long term. I would work closely with community members, especially in neighborhoods that have been historically overlooked in safety planning, to ensure investments are equitable. Data should guide decisions so we target the most dangerous areas first. By combining design, education, and enforcement, we can make Bellevue's streets safe for pedestrians, cyclists, drivers, and transit riders.

What is your approach to improving public safety over the next five years? How will you actualize it?

Public safety is about more than responding to crime. It is about creating conditions where everyone feels secure in their homes, neighborhoods, and public spaces. My approach is to balance prevention, accountability, and trust. I support expanding mental health crisis response teams, which can respond to situations where police are not the most effective or appropriate resource. I would invest in youth engagement programs, community-based violence prevention, and initiatives that build relationships between law enforcement and residents. Transparency and accountability are key to maintaining public trust, which is why I support regular reporting, community oversight, and training focused on de-escalation and cultural competency, and the additional investment needed for law enforcement.

Addressing root causes of crime such as housing instability, unemployment, and untreated mental illness will be a priority. Over the next five years, I would work to align our public safety strategy with our housing, health, and economic policies to ensure we are not just reacting to problems but creating long-term stability and well-being.

The Eastside faces unique challenges when it comes to affordability, transit connectivity, and suburban versus city identity. What are your thoughts on how we can envision the future of urbanism on the Eastside?



The Eastside has an opportunity to lead in creating vibrant, walkable, and sustainable communities that balance the best of urban and suburban living. We can achieve this by building complete neighborhoods where people can live close to work, schools, shops, and transit. Transit-oriented development should be the standard, not the exception. Bellevue and surrounding cities must coordinate on transit investments, bike networks, and pedestrian infrastructure to create a seamless regional system. Housing must be available at a range of prices so that people of all incomes can benefit from the Eastside's growth. Public spaces, parks, and cultural amenities should be integrated into development to foster a sense of community. We must also address climate goals by reducing car dependency through better land use planning and improving access to reliable, frequent public transit. The Eastside's future should be one where urbanism is inclusive and environmentally responsible, offering residents a high quality of life by protecting our cherished neighborhoods and natural beauty of our communities.

Do you support camping bans or sweeps? If elected, how would you adapt or change current law/policies to protect and support our neighbors?

I do not support punitive camping bans or sweeps that criminalize homelessness. These approaches displace people without addressing the root causes of homelessness, and they often make it harder for individuals to access services. Instead, Bellevue should adopt a housing-first approach supported by comprehensive services such as mental health care, addiction treatment, and job assistance. I talked earlier about joint responses between first responders and mental health outreach. I think this is critical. Outreach workers should be the primary point of contact with unhoused residents, building trust and connecting people to safe shelter or permanent housing. Public spaces must remain accessible and safe for everyone, so I support investing in sanitation services, storage options,



and facilities that meet basic needs while individuals transition into housing. Community engagement is important, but we must lead with compassion and evidence-based strategies, not fear or stigma. I will work to expand partnerships with regional agencies and nonprofits to increase shelter capacity, develop more permanent supportive housing, and create clear, humane pathways from homelessness to stability.

In what ways could your city's comprehensive plan go further, and what would you push for to improve it during your tenure?

I was the Chair of Bellevue's Planning Commission during the 2044 comprehensive plan update. We pushed the comprehensive plan far above what was required, planning for 152,000 housing units through 2044. This is a huge step up from the 35,000 units initially proposed. Bellevue's comprehensive plan is a powerful tool for shaping our city's future, but it can go further in addressing housing, climate, and equity. I will continue to push for significant upzoning near transit, legalizing missing middle housing in more neighborhoods, and ensuring new development includes affordable units. Our plan should integrate climate resilience measures, such as expanding the tree canopy, requiring green building standards, and protecting environmentally sensitive areas. Equity must be at the center of planning, with targeted investments in historically underserved neighborhoods for infrastructure, parks, and transit. I will push to streamline permitting, especially for projects that advance affordability and sustainability goals while maintaining high-quality design standards. Public engagement should be inclusive and accessible, with multilingual materials and outreach to communities that are often left out of planning processes. The comprehensive plan should be a living document that responds to changing needs and reflects the values of a diverse and growing city. My goal is to ensure it serves as a roadmap for a Bellevue that is affordable, connected, and environmentally resilient.