

In the 1950s, it had a traditional suburban centre of two-and three-storey buildings along its principal streets.

During the 1960s and 1970s Bellevue's central business district (CBD) acquired a standard regional shopping mall and a haphazard sprinkling of six to thirteen storey office buildings generally set back from the streets in a Modernist fashion. By the mid-1970s the area had taken on a design totally oriented to the ease of automobile use. By the 1980s walking in the area had become demanding and unpleasant. The residential areas adjacent to the CBD felt threatened by the increase in automobile traffic and pollution and faced a potential future of being dwarfed and overshadowed by what was perceived to be out-of-scale development. In addition, residents feared that new office buildings would also 'pop-up' in the residential neighbourhoods of the city. On the outskirts of the city in King County of which Bellevue is a part, strip shopping was being developed. It was perceived to be a threat to the economic viability of Bellevue's CBD.

In the mid-1970s there was a proposal to build a super-regional shopping centre in King County outside Bellevue. The proposal was rejected in accordance with Washington State's strong Environmental Policy Act on the grounds that it would lead to environmental degradation. A non-design tool was thus used to reinforce the viability of Bellevue's downtown. At the same time a positive effort was required if the CBD was to be made attractive. The Bellevue City Planning Commission drew up sub-area plans to halt any potential rezoning of residential areas to commercial use. No buildings outside the downtown were allowed to have a Floor Area Ratio (FAR) of more than 0.5 (i.e. the useable floor area of a building

could be no more than half the site size). This FAR did not stop development of commercial space but led to campus type development along the highways outside Bellevue. It is a type of development that citizens of the city found acceptable.

From the early 1980s onwards much planning (and development) effort in Bellevue has been focused on the CBD. The professional planners of the Bellevue Planning Commission made a decision to encourage all major developments in Bellevue to locate in the CBD. The goal was to have a vibrant 'even discordant' downtown of mixed-uses – a high-density urban place with pedestrian walkways, a revamped transit (bus) system, and parking as part of buildings. One of the planning objectives was to encourage the use of the transit system. The Bellevue City Council adopted this goal as policy in 1981. A central transfer centre (designed by Zimmer Gunsul Frasca) built at a cost of \$US5 million was included in the city centre plan to encourage transit use. The next step was to develop design guidelines for new development based on the desire to make the district pleasant for pedestrians.

A number of steps were taken. Parking requirements for each building were reduced from 5 places per 1000 square feet (about 100 square metres) of development to 3. An incentive zoning scheme was developed whereby buildings were allowed to be taller than specified in the plan in return for ground level amenities. In 1984 the Bellevue City Council adopted a stepped, or wedding-cake, zoning configuration which controlled the height of buildings, the tallest being in the centre to the lowest (single-family homes) on the periphery adjacent to residential neighbourhoods (see Figures 9.4, 9.5 and page 396).