

**CITY HALL IN A MALL? A
QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS ON
INCORPORATING THIRD PLACES
WITHIN GOVERNMENT SPACES**

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Mini City Hall office in Crossroads Mall

Abstract:

We all have places we feel safe and comfortable and often frequent or suggest others visit. While this place may have a special meaning to some, it may just be considered a physical space to others. For many people in the City of Bellevue, the office of Crossroads Mini City Hall is the place that encompasses all of the above meanings and values. This study intends to examine the impact of the Mini City Hall on the community it surrounds and serves. The study will determine how the positionality of this office influences access to social and governmental services among vulnerable communities. A research analysis of Mini City Hall and its services is instrumental due to the diversity of the city's residents regarding their socioeconomic status, language spoken, level of education, age, and other demographic data. This study will include community voices along with stakeholder perspectives on the impact of Mini City Hall. Ultimately, the study urges local municipalities to consider establishing government offices within established third spaces by using Crossroads Mini City Hall as an example.

Key Words:

"Third place" theory, neighborhoods, community need, stakeholders, space, place.

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Finally, to all of the residents who trusted me with their feedback, I will work hard to amplify your voices and continuously improve our services at Mini City Hall.

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CHAPTER 1: PURPOSE OF STUDY

We all have places we feel safe and comfortable and often frequent or suggest others visit. While this place may have a special meaning to some, it may just be considered a physical space to others. A spot in the universe, with a gathering of physical stuff, becomes a place only when it ensconces history or utopia, danger or security, identity, or memory. Despite its relatively enduring and imposing materiality, the meaning or value of the space/place is labile-flexible in the hands of different people or cultures, malleable over time, and inevitably contested (Gieryn 2000; Tuan 1977). For many people in the City of Bellevue, Crossroads Mini City Hall is the place that encompasses all of the above meanings and values. Crossroads Mini City Hall was established in 1994 to create a place where all residents of Bellevue, especially those traditionally marginalized and from vulnerable communities, could access community, city programs, and services. More broadly, Bellevue is the largest minority-majority city in Washington state.

The neighborhood of Crossroads, located in East Bellevue, is the most diverse in the city (Balk, 2016). With such a high concentration of the city's most diverse and vulnerable population, establishing a second City Hall was necessary to meet the needs of the community where they gathered. Considering the unique character of East Bellevue, the city created a Satellite facility within Crossroads Mall. The mall owner, Ron Sher, had created community partnerships based on the sociological "Third Place theory" Crossroads Mini City Hall is located in the Crossroads neighborhood. Like its name, it is a space where various cultures and communities come together to make connections. Crossroads Mini City Hall leverages community partnerships and multi-lingual services to reach communities that do not often frequent government offices due to stigmas and misconceptions. Although the work is nothing

new, the office is one of a kind in Washington state. Offices around the country that are doing similar work will be mentioned further in the study.

This study provides the City of Bellevue and neighboring municipalities with data, stories, and images that describe the creation of Mini City Hall. By considering how this place came to be, we can then learn how other spaces can be transformed into places that matter for the social life of entire communities. Ultimately, this paper aims to highlight how space was transformed into a place of meaningful interactions between community members and the city government.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Historical Background: The Crossroads Neighborhood:

The City of Bellevue is divided into 16 neighborhood areas (Figure 1). Those neighborhoods include BelRed, Bridle Trails, Cougar Mountain / Lakemont, Crossroads, Downtown, Eastgate and Factoria, Lake Hills, Newport, Northeast Bellevue, Northwest Bellevue, Somerset, West Bellevue, West Lake Sammamish, Wilburton, Woodridge. Currently, Bellevue city hall is located in the Downtown neighborhood. In contrast, a satellite city hall is situated in the Crossroads neighborhood. For this study, the Crossroads neighborhood will be further analyzed because it is the neighborhood in which the first Mini City Hall was established.

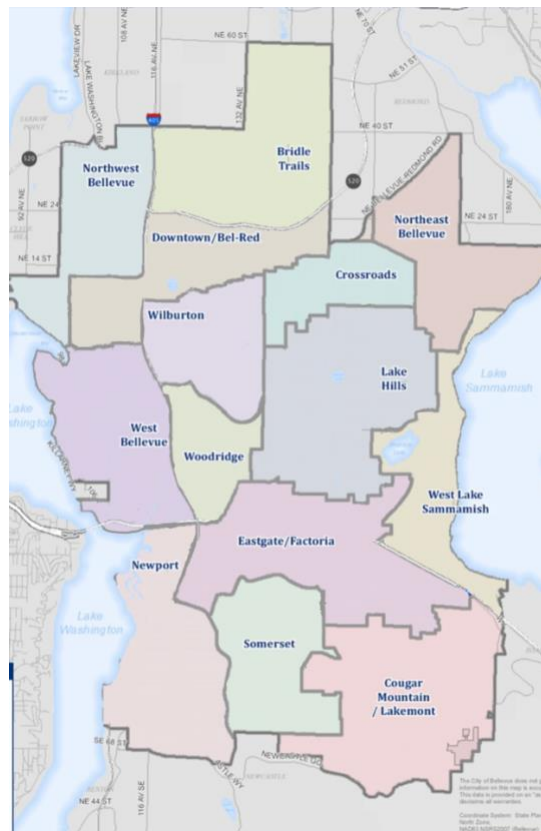


Figure 1: City of Bellevue (Cartographer). (2015). Neighborhood Areas, Bellevue. [Map]Retrieved from <https://bellevuewa.gov/city-government/departments/community-development/neighborhoods/>

The Crossroads neighborhood was formerly known as “Highlands” before the land was logged and cleared during the early nineteenth and twentieth century. By 1920, Japanese farmers had begun transforming Crossroads into fertile land for farming and further development. These efforts were abruptly interrupted when Japanese farmers were forced to leave their lands and possessions due to the Japanese-American internment in 1942. The City of Bellevue, in 1964, later annexed the neighborhood. The changes following the annexation of Crossroads included a tech boom in the 1980s, following the opening of Microsoft in the neighboring city of Redmond, along with an influx of suburban housing from 1920 into the early 2000s (Schein, 2016).

Crossroads Shopping Center

The Crossroads Shopping center opened in 1962, shortly before the neighborhood was annexed. From 1962 to today, the shopping center has changed in many ways, the most obvious difference being the management. At its inception, Crossroads Shopping center was originally 500,000 square feet. The mall had garnered a negative reputation, “one arm of its 1962-vintage concourse was called “Death Valley” because nine of its ten stores were vacant” (Guilbert, 2009). Neighboring the mall was affordable housing apartments and a high immigrant population from Latin America and Southeast Asia relocating to the area. At that time, the owner did not invest in the mall’s maintenance. Buildings were covered with graffiti, and empty parking lots were used for drag racing after hours. Nan Campbell, the Mayor at that time, stated, "The mall owner had not reinvested and had not done anything to stimulate the economy there. The city’s attention was concentrated on [downtown] after they passed the central business district plan in 1981” (Guilbert, 2009). As the neighborhood was becoming plagued by this negative reputation, Ron Sher, a 66-year-old with a generational background in mall development (Guilbert, 2009), did what seemed like an impossible task to others. He purchased Crossroads mall from the

previous owners. He envisioned the space becoming a welcoming public space for the community—a third space.

Mini city hall opens in mall

By Carol Ryan
Journal American Staff Writer

BELLEVUE — Reina Jackson has worked in four city halls and studied international relations at American University in Cairo.

Now, at the ripe old age of 44, Jackson is set to put her experience to work at the new mini city hall in Crossroads Shopping Center.

"I'm really excited," Jackson said Friday from the mall storefront where residents can pay utility bills, find out about volunteer opportunities or get pointed to the city department that can answer their questions.

The city will christen its newest branch office starting today with a week's worth of special events that include a petting zoo, brown-bag lunches with city officials and sessions titled "Meet Ranger Barb" and "All about Bellevue Utilities."

AS MINI CITY hall coordinator, Jackson will put to use her international relations skills, working with the people of many nationalities who live in the area. The job also fills her desire to work for the community and interact with the public.

A political science graduate of the University of Washington, Jackson worked internships at city halls in Seattle, Bremerton and Port Orchard. She currently works in the Bellevue Parks and Community Service Department.

That experience, along with her stint in Egypt, give her key skills she will need at the Crossroads mini city hall.

The idea of the mall office is to reach out to people who might otherwise not seek city services. By going to where Bellevue's most ethnically diverse residents shop, officials hope to draw them into city affairs.

Since the Crossroads office opened two weeks ago, visitors have picked up Metro bus schedules, asked about school programs and voiced concern about a local business that may not have provided adequately for the handicapped.

"A lot of what happens here is reference," said Max Clark, a City Hall management assistant who helped open the Crossroads office. Workers keep records of questions they get so services can be tailored to visitors' needs.

"This is the first effort to find out how to serve (residents') needs without their having to go downtown," Clark said.



Rick Schwartz/Journal American

Crossroads Shopping Center is the site of the new mini city hall.

Mini city hall event schedule

<p>Monday 12:30-3 p.m. — Halloween Happenings</p> <p>Presented by the city Transportation Department 6-8 p.m. — Trick or Treat A Crossroads tradition</p> <p>Tuesday Noon — Lunch with the City Manager Casual brown-bag lunch and conversation with Bellevue City Manager Phil Kushlan.</p> <p>Wednesday 9:30 a.m. — Mall Walkers Invitational Parks Department serves refreshments 10 a.m.-noon — Petting Zoo Hosted by Kelsey Creek farm animals 2-4 p.m. — Meet Ranger Barb Environmental lessons and displays 4-5 p.m. — Hoop Shoot Match your best shot with Parks' Rudy Thomas</p> <p>Thursday 10 a.m.-5 p.m. — All About Bellevue Utilities Practical advice and information from Stream Team, Recycling, Water</p>	<p>Conservation, Utility Billing and Business Partners for Clean Water.</p> <p>Friday 9 a.m. — Coffee with the Council Councilwomen Margot Blacker and Chris Heaton invite you to join them for morning coffee and conversation. Noon — Meet the Chiefs Talk with Fire Chief Pete Lucarelli and the deputy chiefs over brown-bag lunch. 1-3 p.m. — Neighborhood Enhancement Meet the team that listens to your ideas for neighborhood improvement. 7:30 p.m. — Big Band Dance Mayor Don Davidson and Deputy Mayor Chris Heaton join the audience for an evening of big band entertainment by the Harley Brumbaugh Quintet.</p> <p>Saturday 10 a.m.-5 p.m. — DARE to be GREAT Officers from Bellevue's drug and gang resistance programs talk with kids and give out trading cards. 10 a.m.-2 p.m. — Human Services Survey Saturday Express your views in a brief survey.</p>
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Figure 2 Ryan, C. (1994) Mini City Hall Opens in Mall. Journal American

Third Place Theory: What is it?

The third-place theory is a sociological term used to describe a place classified between home and work. It is a space that enables relationship-building in a third location which brings together the best features of each (Francis et al., 2012). It also seeks to further the conversation around the difference between spaces and places. As seen through the vocabulary of placemaking – third places provide people with a place in which there is a balance between the emotive attachments of home and family and the challenge of striving for merit and reward in the marketplace (Wexler and Oberlander, 2017). Among the attributes people seek from third places are enhanced sociability, a sense of membership, and a common intention of sharing, and given this satisfying sense of personal significance, one frequently returns (Cheang, 2002).

The term provides a transdisciplinary scope because it intertwines the social, the historical, and the spatial. It cuts across all perspectives and modes of thought and is not confined solely to geographers, architects, urbanists, and others for whom spatial thinking is a primary professional preoccupation (Soja, 1999, pg.3). Additionally, Edward Soja, a geographer, and self-proclaimed urbanist argues thirdspaces encourage us to think differently about the meanings and significance of space and those related concepts that compose and comprise the inherent spatiality of human life: place, location, locality, landscape, environment, home, city, region, territory, and geography (Soja, 1999, pg. xii).

The term itself was first introduced in the social science realm in the 1970s. Used to describe the action of placemaking, the term “third place” was labeled by Oldenburg and Brisset (1982) and popularized by Oldenburg (1989; 2001). Oldenburg described eight characteristics (Figure 3) of a Third Place in his 1999 book, *The Great Good Place*.

Neutral ground	These spaces must be ones where individuals can come and go freely. Without these spaces, there will be a lack of associates outside the home.
A leveling place	A space in which all participants are all equal regardless of position, income, and identity.
A place of conversations mainly	With the establishment of a neutral place, the activity of conversation can more comfortably happen. Nothing more clearly indicates a third place than that the talk there is good.
A place of accessibility & accommodation	A space that is available to render the best and fullest service at any time of the day or evening. Access to such spaces must be accessible in terms of both times and location for it to be a powerful resource, service, and serve the community. Third places must stand ready to serve people's needs for sociability and relaxation in the intervals before, between, and after their mandatory appearances elsewhere.
A place of The Regulars	Every regular was once a newcomer, and the acceptance of new comers is essential to the sustained vitality of the third place. Acceptance into the circle is not difficult, but it is not automatic either. By starting with trust building, it will also determine the strength of welcome each visitor experiences.
A place of Low Profile	Although the physical structure of third places typically appears plain, the main objective is to create a place where people linger and are in good company. The physical structure should not overlook the value of the environment and experiences found within a third place. More importantly, it allows regulars of these spaces to come as they are without feeling self-conscious.
A Playful Atmosphere	The atmosphere should solicit an urge in the regulars to return, recreate, and recapture experiences there again.
A Home Away from Home	This space allows visitors to experience a social regeneration with close individuals away from home. There is a "freedom to be" without worrying about how others may view the expression of personality. Lastly, there is a "warmth" that cannot be explained but is personally felt and experienced.



Figure 3: Visualization of Oldenburg's (1999) eight characteristics of a "third place."

Communitarian Third Places:

Communitarian third places are grounded in civil society assumptions which highlight the importance of special places designed to improve social conditions by attending to social problems (Van Til, 2000). Communitarian third places can be employed in three ways, all of which use a governance system (Choudhury and Ahmed, 2002). The first option, which can be labeled the public sector option, uses a social problem orientation in which government buy-in is necessary. The second option, the not-for-profit option, relies upon community and societal members to continue. Finally, the third option depends on businesses that value philanthropic giving and sponsorship and are willing to seek social benefits rather than immediate profits. In the case of Mini City Hall, it utilizes both the public sector and the not-for-profit option to create the place residents utilize. All partnerships that utilize the space within Mini City Hall are required to be nonprofit organizations and must provide their services for free to all visitors.

These services include counseling sessions with experts regarding legal, medical, educational, and other social services.

The role of space and place is a crucial discussion in this study. The urban space is an engineering area, an abstract term that has no social and cultural connection or value. While the urban place is a site that is created with the aim of human improvements, such as social or cultural values that are full of different human experiences (El-Sieedy et al., 2021). Only by examining the nuances behind how social and spatial spaces are created and located can one draw conclusions regarding justice and equity in distributing resources to those who need them the most.

Third spaces call upon government agencies, not-for-profit organizations, churches, temples, mosques, synagogues, prayer halls, and socially responsible businesses to design, operate, fund, maintain and sponsor communitarian third places. This, as a result, manifests as a component of well-defined public places designed to enhance civic identity, quality of life, social capital, and community revitalization whilst improving economic development (Goosen & Cilliers, 2020).

Crossroads Mini City Hall

A central theory behind the formation and operation of Mini City Hall is the Third-Place theory. Crossroads Mini City Hall is uniquely located in the neighborhood of Crossroads and is famously known to be a space in which various cultures and communities come together to make connections. Crossroads Mini City Hall leverages community partnerships and multi-lingual services to reach communities that do not often frequent government offices due to stigmas and misconceptions. Although the work is nothing new, the office itself is one of a kind. Offices around the country doing similar work can be found in figure 4. Some limitations these sites

posed included site locations being far away from public transportation, unfriendly staff, long wait times, and limited space occupancy (McCormick-Huentelman et al., 2018).

Site	Location	Services
Southcenter Library	Tukwila, Washington	Help conducting job searches, assistance with career advancement, support developing computer skills, help accessing materials in different languages, and tutoring to improve reading competencies. Resources such as printers, scanners, and copiers are also available to the public. Story time for toddlers is another program offered at no cost to community members.
Coral Springs City Hall in the mall	Coral Springs, Florida	The site offers fingerprinting, garbage and recycling information, fax and photocopy services, notary assistance, and voter registration help. The passport services are the most utilized of all. Its location is accessible not just to people who use single occupancy vehicles but also to those who rely on public transportation, with three bus lines serving the mall.
Philadelphia Northeast Municipal Services Center	Philadelphia, Pennsylvania	Assistance for tax filing and utility payments, consultations with government representatives, and permitting services.

Figure 4: Livable City Year research conclusions synthesized. <https://lcy.be.uw.edu/>

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Design Overview:

This study investigates the transformation of spaces into places of connection and community. More specifically, this study analyzes the impact and importance of Mini City Hall located within Crossroads Mall in the City of Bellevue. The study takes on an embedded case study design where Mini City Hall will be analyzed in the context of the City of Bellevue. A case study traditionally studies a bounded system, such as a process, an activity, an event, a program, or multiple individuals through various forms of data collection (Creswell, 2007, p120). Case studies are often seen as prime escapes of qualitative research, which adopt an interpretive approach to data, studies ‘things’ within their context, and consider the subjective meanings that people bring to their situation. (De Vaus, 2001, p.10). They achieve explanations by building a complete picture of the sequence of events as interpreted by participants, and their meanings are given by a context that gives their purposes. It involves telling a plausible, convincing, and logical story of how events unfold and how they are linked. (De Vaus, 2001, p.236). This approach will allow for a systematic analysis to better understand how the history and motivation behind this space's inception have allowed it to become a “third place.”

Survey Data:

This research has utilized two types of data collection. The first is a survey containing nine multiple choice and short answer questions. The survey was provided to individuals who visited Mini City Hall during operational hours. This way, a purposeful sampling strategy was used to determine survey participants. Purposeful sampling selects individuals and sites for a

study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem (Creswell, 2007, p.125).

Interview Data:

Interviewing has a wide variety of forms and a multiplicity of uses. The most common type of interviewing is individual, face-to-face verbal interchange, but it can also take the form of face-to-face group interviewing, mailed or self-administered questionnaires, and telephone surveys. Interviewing can be structured, semi-structured, or unstructured. It can be used for marketing purposes, to gather political opinions, for therapeutic reasons, or to produce data for academic analysis (Fontana & Frey, 1994)

For this research, three semi-informal interviews were conducted via zoom with stakeholders who played a role in the formation and maintenance of Mini City Hall. Interviews consisted of seven questions that sought to gauge an understanding of each participant's role in the formation or maintenance of Mini City Hall, the influence of partnerships, the impact on the community, and the difference between Mini City Hall at its inception compared to present day operations and future expansion plans. Responses collected from participants were categorized into six distinctive themes and will be explained further in the results section. The chart below includes a list of interviewees and their connection to Mini City Hall.

Name	Role	Duration of time at Mini City Hall
Barb Tuninga	Previous Manager (Retired)	20 years

Ying Carlson	Current Manager	15
Linda Sakamoto	Coordinator (Retired)	10

A semi-structured interview allowed the interviewee flexibility to stick to the script of questions while also permitting relevant information to be included in the conversation. All interviewees have given consent to have their names and positions included in this research.

Historical Facts and Artifacts:

This research also offers a unique glimpse into the history of the local area. History and past events heavily influenced the development of the Crossroads neighborhood and, more broadly, the creation of Mini City Hall. Using a case study design, history isn’t eliminated from the “wider context and allows for the exploration of concurrent events and their contribution to observed outcomes. Including a historical and contextual overview emphasizes our understanding and allows us to arrive at a fuller and richer understanding”. (De Vaus, 2001, p..236). Historical artifacts in newspaper clippings are also included to show the historical significance and impact Mini City Hall had on the community it serves. Newspaper images were taken from The Seattle Times, Seattle Post-Intelligence, It’s Your City publications, and Bellevue Reporter.

Finally, a community-based needs assessment and analysis collected and published by the City of Bellevue and a needs data report collected by Mini City Hall will be included to provide a general understanding of the human service needs being met by Mini City Hall.

Data Source:

The data included in this research includes data taken from the following sources: the 2020-2022 Human Services Needs Survey, Mini City Hall Data Report that conveys trends in the community, survey responses collected from visitors of Mini City Hall, and finally, interviews with stakeholders.

The Human Needs Survey conducted by the City of Bellevue is updated at the beginning of each two-year funding cycle. These reports date back to 1989 and are used to gauge human service needs, trends, and gaps in Bellevue, East King County, King County, and Washington. *The 2021-2022 Human Services Needs Update provides a snapshot of what residents need and how the City of Bellevue and other groups in the community are coming together to respond using a “collective impact” approach. Collective impact is defined as the commitment of key players from different sectors in the community to a common agenda for effective problem-solving. (City of Bellevue, 2022)*

According to the 2020-2021 Human Services Needs survey,

In 2020, staff at the City of Bellevue’s Mini City Hall at Crossroads Shopping Center received more than 30,000 requests from customers asking for resource and information referrals. During the second quarter of 2020 (the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic), 61% of resource and information requests were related to human services; in 2018 and 2019, these percentages were 56% and 57%, respectively, the same period. As the pandemic continued to rage on, the need intensified: in the 3rd quarter of 2020, the percentage of overall requests related to human services rose to 80%, a stark difference from 56% (2018) and 55% (2019). Many people who have requested assistance have never asked for help in the past.

The most frequent requests are food, shelter, unemployment, and rental assistance.

The need for legal assistance along with immigration issues also continues to be the undertone of most customer interactions.

These findings are tracked through the Mini City Hall Data report which is an internal tracking system used by Mini City Hall Staff to track needs and services requested on site. The data collected in the system date to 2014 but was updated to include a more comprehensive list of human services in 2020. This system gathers information into five bins/categories. These categories are general information/referral, city information, human services, partnerships, and languages. Mini City Hall staff input daily requests into a tracking system later categorized and visualized within the Power BI system. Power BI is software that allows users to interact with and visualize collected data in order to draw conclusions and insights. As the human service need rose to 80% in 2020, Mini City Hall launched a COVID-19 Resource Navigator Program in order to better assist vulnerable residents in navigating community resources. Simultaneously, to increase access to resources, the office also launched an interactive Community Resource Map so that residents could access information digitally while the office was temporarily closed. It is through these various data collection processes that Mini City Hall is able to get a pulse check on the state of the community it serves.

Surveying Process:

It is important to note that certain aspects of the presented data collection were participatory-based. Participatory research focuses on the sequential reflection and action carried out by local people rather than on them (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995); by including community voices in the research process, they are empowered to shape the solutions and services they

envision seeing in the community. Additionally, it ensures a comprehensive analysis of community feedback and firsthand knowledge in the evaluation process. Mini Hall is best understood by the community that utilizes its services, and their insight is subsequently critical in this research.

With the research question aiming to address the impact of Mini City Hall, survey questions were developed to address geographic areas residents reside in, levels of access based on location, and first-hand perspectives on overall experience at Mini City Hall. The survey was conducted over a period of two weeks 07/09/22 to 07/23/22. Responses were collected via Google forms, and all answers were anonymous. The survey yielded (n=11) responses over the course of two weeks. All participants were introduced to the survey, followed by a consent agreement. The consent agreement is as follows.

Please consider taking this Resident Experience Survey to help determine how Mini City Hall can best utilize its space to meet the needs of the community it serves. My name is Hana Abdulrahman, and I am a Master of Arts in Policy Studies (MAPS) student at the University of Washington.

Participation in the survey will be voluntary, and your survey responses are confidential. Answers will be stored in Google Forms in a password-protected electronic format. Your identity will be protected since the survey is designed to be anonymously completed.

Once the data has been analyzed, it will be destroyed.

Contact: For further questions and concerns about your participation in this study, please contact me via email at: hanaa3@uw.edu

Upon acceptance of the consent agreement, participants were directed to a map that mapped all 12 neighborhood areas within Bellevue. The goal of this question was to determine the geographical location visitors resided. This would determine the distance residents would travel to visit our office. Additionally, it would evaluate our office's reach and the gaps in service.

Furthermore, respondents were asked an open-ended question about their opinion on Mini City Hall's current location. Next, participants were asked how often they visited Mini City Hall. Multiple choice options included the most frequent option being "weekly," "this being their first time," and two more options in between those two options. Following this, respondents were asked three additional questions to elicit community feedback on the service experience they gained at Mini City Hall. One question explicitly asks respondents to describe their experience in one word. The survey also includes a question that allows respondents an opportunity to provide suggestions to improve Mini City Hall. Finally, respondents are asked to briefly explain why they visit Mini City Hall rather than City Hall in the Downtown neighborhood area. This last question highlighted the driving force that brings residents to Mini City Hall despite its geographical location.

Interviewing Process:

For the interviews, there were a total of three participants total. These individuals included Barb Tuninga (Previous manager of Mini City Hall), Ying Carlson (Current Mini City Hall Manager) Linda Sakamoto (Retired Mini City Hall Coordinator). These three individuals were identified as stakeholders because they had a direct role in the inception and maintenance of Crossroads Mini City Hall. During the semi-structured interview, they were asked questions that would determine the importance of the Mini City Hall's geographic location, limitations,

and improvements for this space, and individual participants' roles in the creation of Mini City Hall. Interviews were conducted via zoom for 30 minutes to an hour. Conversations were recorded using Zoom and transcribed using Office 365. Excerpts from interviews were used to highlight Mini City Hall's impact on the greater Bellevue community.

- They have a voice— it was valued
- We were of help with their concerns and needs
- We offered encouragement— to believe in themselves and that they can accomplish what needs to be done.
- We helped them navigate not only governmental procedures but the reasoning to solve their problems by offering them the opportunity to discover and think of options not always apparent.



Figure 7: Code Cloud containing "Connecting People" theme

Connecting People

“I think it’s really important to focus on the broader listening and eliciting the one-on-one relationship building, and then the broader listening of the ear to the ground. I spent time out in

the community and at Mini City Hall as a manager, trying to figure out what would inspire the community to come together and be as close as they could get. I feel that the more connections there are, the stronger a community is; the stronger it is, the more resilient they are” Barb Tuninga.



Figure 8: Newspaper clippings highlight the relationship building and connections Mini City Hall staff/volunteers established within the community.



Figure 9: Code Cloud containing "Partnerships" theme.

Partnerships

Partnerships played a massive role in the formation of Mini City Hall; it is one of the most appreciated factors of its operation. Mini City Hall functions through partnerships with other

government agencies, community organizations, and the Crossroads Mall management.

Partnerships include:

- Centro Cultural Mexicano— Rental Assistance
- King County Metro (ORCA card)

- Hopelink Food Program
- Overlake Hospital Spanish CPR Program
- United Way Tax Preparation
- Hopelink Energy Assistance Program
- Chinese Information and Service Center (CISC)-- Eastside Cultural Navigator Program (Russian & Chinese)
- Statewide Health Insurance Benefits (SHIBA) – Medicare enrollment
- King County Library System (KCLS) Computer Coach
- King County Public Health – Healthcare Access
- International Community Health Services (ICHS) – Obamacare enrollment and healthcare information
- Indian American Community Services (IACS) – Social services

Access through language

As many Mini City Hall clients have limited English proficiency. Mini City Hall staff aim to provide culturally appropriate and linguistically inclusive customer service. Many of the team and volunteers are multi-lingual and intentionally deliver multilingual written materials. Below are some languages that Mini City Hall staff and volunteers speak. When assisting clients who speak other languages not spoken by staff, Language Line interpretation services are used.

- Telugu
- Gujarati
- Marathi
- Tamil
- Kannada
- Cantonese Chinese
- Mandarin Chinese
- Spanish
- Russian
- Ukrainian

for the community, and it gives the shopping center some legitimacy because you know you can go there for services, you can go to the library, you can visit the police station not too far away, you can get your tabs renewed. You can get everything taken care of in one place, and although Mini City Hall is a government office, it is community-oriented” Ying Carlson.



Figure 12: Code Cloud containing "Trust" theme.

Trust

Trust is a component mentioned in every interview because it genuinely encompasses all of Mini City Hall’s work. Without a foundation of trust, much of the work done at Mini City Hall would not be possible.

Ying Carlson mentioned this when she said, Our service model is not only to provide city resources and programs but also to facilitate office hours for nonprofit organizations. Some might say that CISC (Chinese Information Service Center, a non-profit organization) has been around for years, and they currently have an office in lake hills; why not send people there? But you'd be surprised how positively people acknowledge an organization once we bring them into our space where the community feels safe, and trust has already been established”.

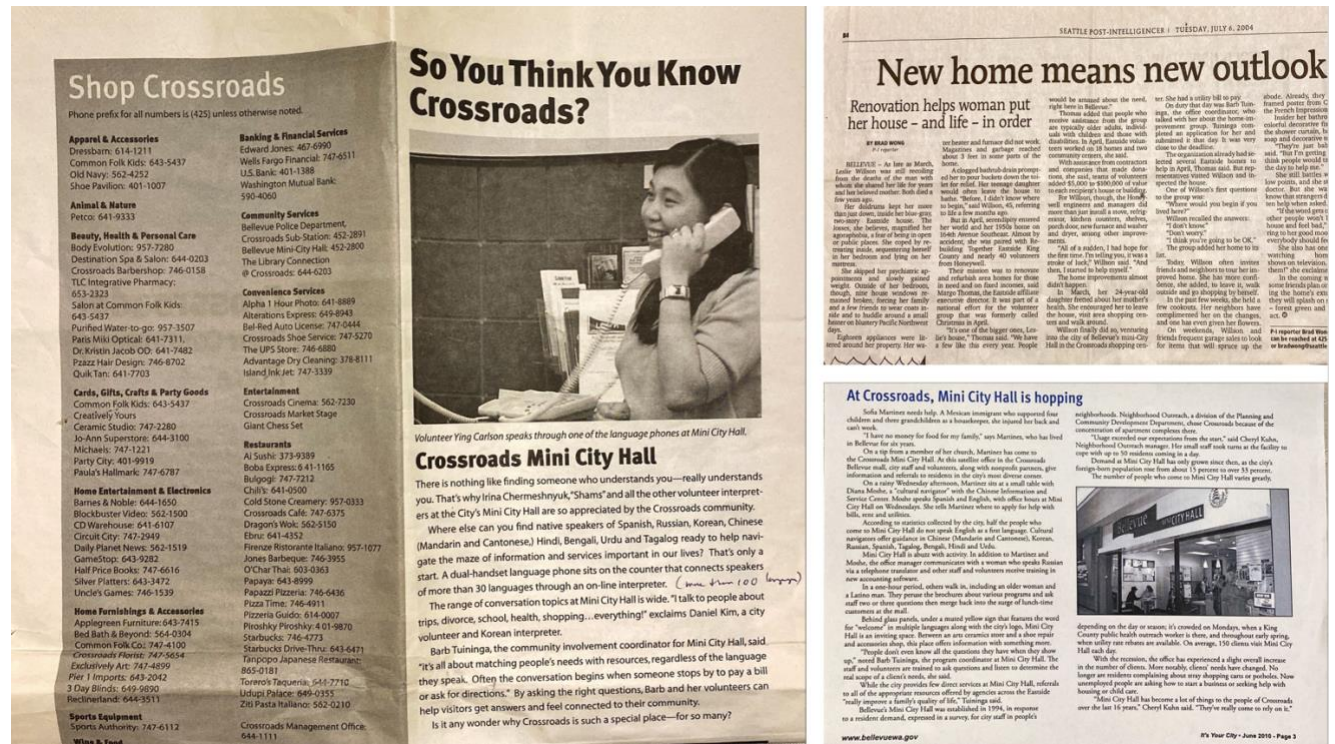


Figure 13: Newspaper clippings containing various services Mini City Hall assisted visitors with and thus earned community trust.

Survey Results

A survey of nine questions was conducted to capture the voices of the communities served at Mini City Hall. The survey aimed to gauge the following three themes:

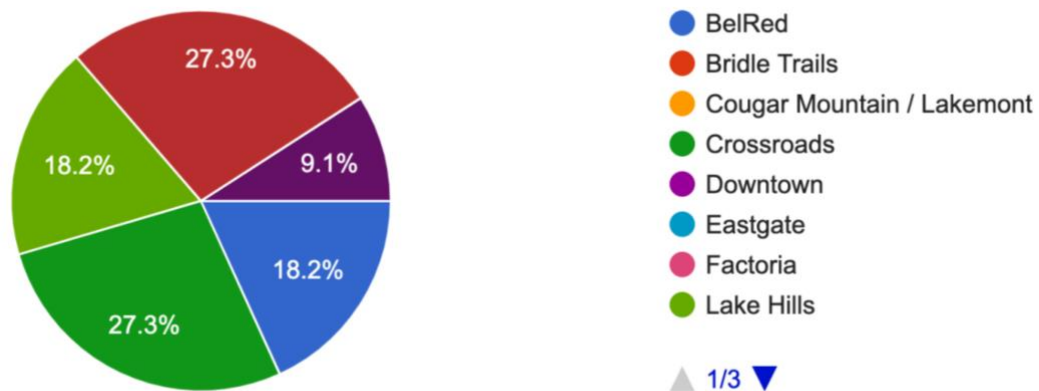
1. The locational proximity of the residents to Mini City Hall and City Hall in downtown Bellevue.
2. The service or experience residents anticipated vs. what they received.
3. Suggestions/Improvements that could be made

Locational Proximity:

Residents were provided with a neighborhood map of Bellevue to gauge their locational proximity to Crossroads Mini City Hall. It was evident from their neighborhood area that many people chose to visit Mini City Hall due to its proximity to their homes. Of the participants

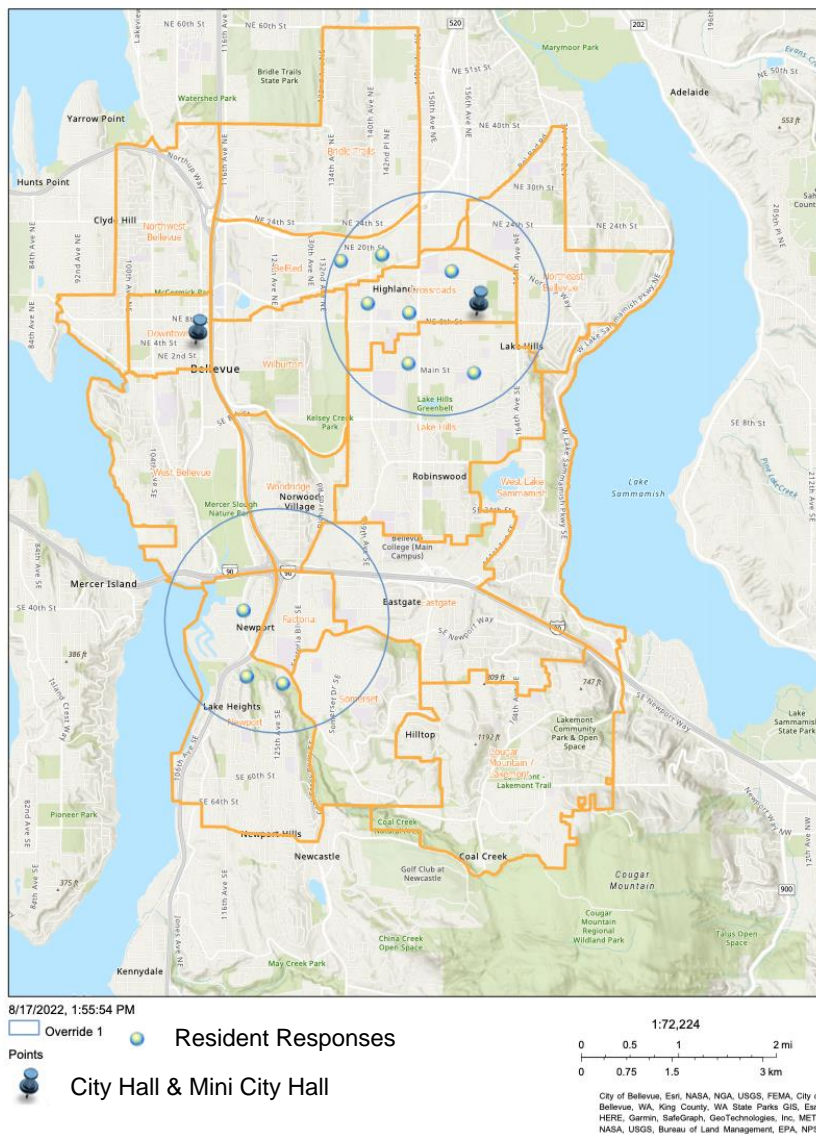
surveyed, 63% of them stated that they visited the office due to “convenience,” “close location to my home,” or other positive factors attributed to the locational proximity of Mini City Hall.

Figure 15 shows that 70% of Mini City Hall visitors live in neighboring areas within East Bellevue. The remaining 30% of respondents lived in South Bellevue. This observation was crucial because the city plans to expand services by creating an additional office in South Bellevue. According to respondents who lived in South Bellevue, it was more convenient for them to travel to Mini City Hall in Crossroads rather than City Hall in Downtown Bellevue.



— Figure 14: Survey results showing neighborhood areas respondents reside

Q.1 What neighborhood do you currently reside in?



The City of Bellevue does not guarantee that the information on this map is accurate or complete. This data is provided on an "as is" basis and disclaims all warranties.

Figure 15: Map signifying neighborhood areas residents currently reside.

Expectations Vs. Service received

Community members also shared that they typically visit Mini City Hall for information referrals, to pay their water bills, or to seek assistance from staff members who speak other languages. Participants' responses regarding their experience of visiting Mini City Hall spoke about their positive experiences with friendly staff members. Responses included comments such

Discussion:

“People may forget what you did for them, but they will never forget how you made them feel” (Barb Tuninga).

From all of the interviews, a universal conclusion that could be drawn was an overwhelming sense of commitment to service. Starting from Mini City Hall’s inception, the goal of this office was to create a welcoming space for the East Bellevue community and to bridge a service gap the city had noticed. Using an already existing third space allowed the city to reach out to the community in a place they already trusted and gathered. Additionally, partnerships with community organizations strengthened these organizations' credibility while increasing services to Mini City Hall visitors. Now that Mini City Hall has been open for 28 years, the services provided, partnerships, and the number of visitors served has only increased.

A unique insight also mentioned in the interviews was that Mini City Hall benefited not only visitors but also staff and volunteers. Interviewees noted that they experienced personal growth. The work they did was not only rewarding but also life-affirming. Mini City Hall is unique in that staff and volunteers have developed a sense of trust in the community, allowing residents to report concerns and trends in the community. With this information, the office can use city resources to create programs to address these concerns. Community partnerships are utilized when city staff are restricted from providing specific services. In this way, Mini City Hall serves as a linking point for the local government to a community that would otherwise not access services in City Hall due to various barriers and personal reasons. This was confirmed in the survey responses from residents because 70% of residents reported living in East Bellevue. It can be assured that Mini City Hall is creating an accessible option for East Bellevue residents to access services. Convenience and proximity were overwhelming driving forces for visitors to

seek assistance at Mini City Hall. For those that traveled outside of the east Bellevue perimeters, their motivation can again be drawn back to the dedicated staff who provide multilingual services.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Limitations

While this research aimed to incorporate as much community input as possible, the limited sample size was one limitation. Mini City Hall serves a diverse population, and it was very apparent that the survey sample would not be able to fully encompass all of the experiences and voices of the community serves. Nonetheless, the choices that were captured in this study shared experiences that were very valuable and important to highlight. On the other hand, many visitors to the site were willing to share their experience with me but expressed hesitancy to have it recorded. For this reason, I believed it was essential to supplement the study with external research and data representing the community to share the impact of Mini City Hall.

External Validity

A profound understanding of a case, it is argued, provides no basis for generalizing to a wider population beyond that case. A case is just that – a case – and cannot be representative of a larger universe of cases. (De Vaus, 2001, pg.237). While this study can provide an in-depth analysis of the impacts of Mini City Hall in the Crossroads area, it does not strive to generalize that the same results will occur elsewhere if replicated. One major reason Crossroads Mini City Hall is so successful in reaching the community's needs is that it was created within an already established third place. Other neighborhood areas have their own unique history and identity. They are composed of diverse populations and community needs, which must also be considered before making conclusions. However, it can be argued that third spaces are ideal for additional Mini City Hall locations.

Conclusion

Mini City Hall plays an integral role in the Bellevue community by connecting residents to city services and community partners. While city employees are limited in the direct services they can provide residents, Mini City Hall leverages community partners to meet the need of the community. Mini City Hall achieved this through an established partnership with Crossroads Shopping center, a beloved third place in the community. The City of Bellevue should actively play a role in the establishment and support of ‘third places’ throughout the city as they play a crucial role in community connectedness, creating a sense of belonging, and a means of creating partnerships. As the city looks to establish a secondary Mini City Hall, Crossroads Mini City Hall is a prime example of how an established third place can act as a suitable space and place.

Further Considerations

In accordance with the City of Bellevue 2024 comprehension plan, the city aims to assess the need and viability of creating more third spaces within Bellevue. I suggest establishing more satellite city halls within these spaces throughout the various neighborhood areas of Bellevue.

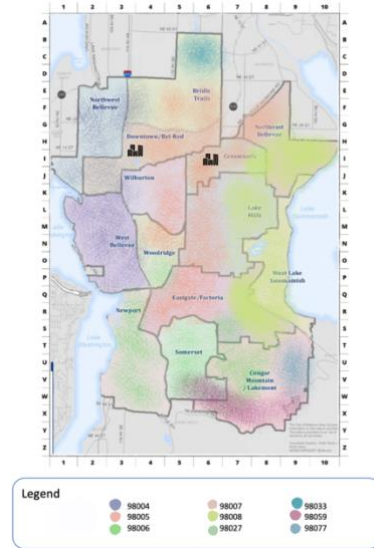
To better meet the needs of each neighborhood area, we must understand the unique identity of each of the 16 neighborhood areas of Bellevue. Once we understand the neighborhood, the City of Bellevue should invest in existing third places where the community currently gathers. One way of investing is to create similar partnerships to Mini City Hall in Crossroads Mall. If a third place does not already exist, the City should allocate funding to establish a space for the community to gather and access community resources.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Survey Questionnaire

- What part of Bellevue do you currently reside in? (Reference map)

- Bel-Red
- Bridle Trails
- Cougar Mountain / Lakemont
- Crossroads
- Downtown
- Eastgate
- Factoria
- Lake Hills
- Newport
- Northeast Bellevue
- Northwest Bellevue
- Somerset
- West Bellevue



- West Lake Sammamish
- Wilburton
- Woodridge
- Outside of Bellevue

- How often do you visit Mini City Hall?

- Weekly
- Monthly
- Not very often
- This is my first time here

- What do you think about the location where Mini City Hall is situated?

- What are your thoughts on the location in which Mini City Hall is situated?
- What service or experience do you gain from Mini City Hall?
- How would you describe your experience of visiting Mini City Hall?
- If you could describe Mini City Hall in one word, what would that be?
- What suggestions would you make to improve Mini City Hall?
- Why do you visit Mini City Hall instead of City Hall downtown?

Appendix 2: Interview Questions

- What was your role in the creation of Mini City Hall?
- What was your purpose in creating this partnership (City Hall & Crossroads Mall)?
- What made this space made it a good fit for this partnership? What limitations did it pose?
- How would you imagine this space expanding?
- How have the changes that occurred after your time compared to the initial plans for this space?
- Why was it important to have Mini City Hall within this space (Crossroads Mall)?
- How would you describe the impact of this place (Mini City Hall) on the community it serves?

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