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City of Bellevue Signage Design Guidelines

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UW HCDE Capstone Project

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Introduction

This design system was created in May 2024 by Team M.A.K.E. Gr8, four capstone students at the Department of Human Centered Design & Engineering at the University of Washington. It is intended as inspiration for the City of Bellevue's Parks and Community Services as they look towards updating their signage.

This project **evaluated the accessibility** of current park signage and **identified effective ways to improve signage accessibility**. We defined accessibility as focusing specifically on language, universal symbology, the ability level of features like trails, and the physical placement of the signs. This design system is presented alongside a final research report created across four milestone phases. We have also attached a PDF containing over 300 National Parks Service universal symbols.

The project's target population was **visitors** to Bellevue parks, trails, and community center users (this is not limited to Bellevue citizens). We narrowed our focus for **field observations** to two exemplary locations: Mercer Slough Nature Park (a trail recommended by City of Bellevue due to some portions being difficult to navigate) and Crossroads Park (a large and popular park). For **user research interviews**, we looked for people who have visited a Bellevue park, trail, or community center at least once within the past year. And finally, our **user research survey** was fully open to the public for anyone to respond to.

The issue of accessibility in signage is most important for **safety**. Signs provide **navigation** so visitors don't become lost, and they provide **emergency hotlines or procedures**. Beyond that, signage accessibility is important for **inclusivity** and **user experience**. Having accessible signage allows more people to visit and interact with parks and trails, promoting community bonding. Accessible signage also improves the user experience for visitors: because the **information on signs is more easily understood**, visitors may be more satisfied and comfortable with their time in the park. More broadly, we need to nurture green space and allow people to enjoy the environment we have here in Western Washington. Accessible signage is a part of this effort.

Our design challenge question is: How might we **improve the accessibility of signage** for the City of Bellevue?

Our research questions are as follows:

- How do our users understand what **features to visit in a park** and the different ways of getting from **point A to point B**?
- What gaps or barriers in **signage and wayfinding** keep people from fully enjoying our parks and trails?

Color Palette

Current Bellevue Color Palette

Bellevue Blue

HEX: #006598
CMYK: 99 56 18 5

Use for park
guidelines sign and
rules signs

Dark Blue

HEX: #144256
CMYK: 93 66 46 35

Use for navigation
color-coding and
large graphics

Light Blue

HEX: #57b8c1
CMYK: 62 6 24 0

Use for navigation
color-coding

Green

HEX: #42796f
CMYK: 76 36 56 14

Use for navigation
color-coding

Light Green

HEX: #c4e8e3
CMYK: 22 0 12 0

Use for navigation
color-coding

Proposed additions

Alert Orange

HEX: #e45200
CMYK: 0 57 89 11 *

Use to highlight
important aspects
of graphics

Light Orange

HEX: #f1bf85
CMYK: 0 20 42 5 *

Use to color-code
park entrances on
signage

Red

HEX: #C80000
CMYK: 0 78 78 22 *

Use for no symbols
on prohibited acts

Black

Use for text on Light
Blue, Light Green,
and Light Orange

White

Use for text on
Bellevue Blue, Dark
Blue, and Green

* These CMYK color codes
were found using [Colorbook's](#)
[hex to CMYK converter](#).
Different converters may have
different results, as hex to
CMYK conversion isn't
standard.

Symbology

The universal symbol library designed by Meeker & Associates for the National Parks Service can be harnessed by the City of Bellevue as a way to **communicate rules, points of interest, and general information about park services**. This collection of symbols was initially designed in 1983 and was most recently updated in 2022, and has been used by local, state, and federal park organizations around the world.

We have attached the PDF containing nearly **300 NPS symbols**, and we have highlighted symbols that we believe would be useful for Bellevue parks and trails. Note that these do not exhaustively cover all symbols that the City of Bellevue may need to use. For our sign prototypes, for cases where we couldn't find appropriate NPS symbols, we used other symbol resources.

Below are some examples that can be used as **labels, small signs, or map icons** for the City of Bellevue. To the right, the three sign variations from Meeker & Associates show sign variations for these symbols.

Example Landmark and Resource Signs



Community Garden



Example Health and Safety Signs



First Aid



Sign Variations



Ordinary



Prohibited



Caution



Ranger Station



Slippery Steps



Bridge



Uneven Walkways
(e.g. muddy trails)

Typography

All font sizes will be in the range of 12pt to 65pt and will be determined based on the size of the sign and printing method used.

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
1234567890
(,:?!\$&*)

Title font:

Montserrat Regular
Montserrat Bold

To be used for sign titles, in larger font than Header and Body.

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
1234567890
(,:?!\$&*)

Header font:

Montserrat Regular
Montserrat Bold

To be used for headers of sections.

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
1234567890
(,:?!\$&*)

Body font:

Montserrat Regular

To be used for any wording on signage not assigned Title or Header.

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
1234567890
(,:?!\$&*)

Trailhead body font:

Inter Regular

To be used for trailhead markers.

Graphics and Sign Layout

Text and graphics shown are for reference only. Final text and graphics to be determined by Bellevue Parks and Community Services.

All lettering and graphics to be white with exception of icon overlays.



Signage

Park Rules Sign



This park rules sign features a top section that covers park open times and leash-and-scoop rules, a rule that we wanted to emphasize as it is frequently an issue. The bottom section covers other prohibited actions; of the 12 prohibited actions on the original sign, we kept 8 actions as we wanted to **minimize information overload**. We recommend that Parks and Community Services **identify which prohibited actions are most important** to show.

Recommended sign locations:

- At entrances to parks
- At trailheads
- Height: follow regular City of Bellevue park signage height standards

Sources: Almost all symbols were sourced from Icons8, the Noun Project, and Iconify as we were unable to directly access high-quality vectors of NPS symbols. The alcohol symbol and tent symbol were recreated from NPS symbols. The leash-and-scoop symbol was sourced from the current Bellevue parks leash-and-scoop sign. See Resources. The City of Bellevue Seal was sourced from <https://bellevuewa.gov/>.

Signage

Leash-and-Scoop Sign



This leash-and-scoop sign prominently features a graphic of a person walking a leashed dog and also throwing away pet waste. The title emphasizes the **reason for why it is important to follow** leash-and-scoop rules (to keep parks **safe and clean**), and the sign also displays a possible penalty to not following this rule.

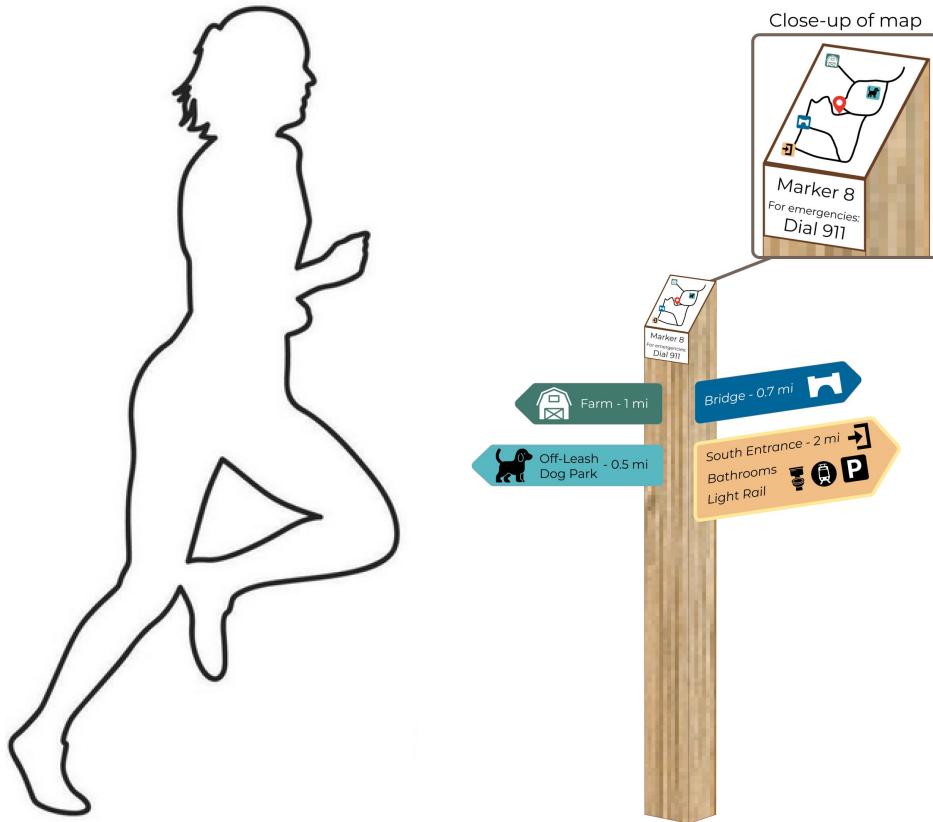
Recommended sign locations:

- At parks that have had issues with leash-and-scoop rules. Post every 200 feet
- Height: follow regular City of Bellevue park signage height standards

Sources: All symbols were sourced from Iconify, a plugin on the Figma design application. The City of Bellevue Seal was sourced from <https://bellevuewa.gov/>.

Signage

Trail Navigation Sign



This trailhead navigation post features color-coded arrow flags pointing visitors to **points-of-interest** and a **slanted mini-map** at the top of the post. The post is hip-level to **not disrupt the visual natural environment**. Each flag is color-coded using the City of Bellevue color palette. Flags directing visitors to park entrances are colored light orange to draw attention, and also can include symbols for parking, bathrooms (we chose a toilet rather than the binary-gendered man and woman symbol), and a King County Metro Lightrail symbol. **Each point-of-interest is given its own symbol.** The map at the top of the post uses these color-coded symbols to help visitors see where they are. We recommend that for these point-of-interest symbols, the City of Bellevue uses symbols from the National Parks Service collection of symbols.

Recommended sign locations:

- At major trail forks, where users would be led to significantly different destinations depending on the fork they choose
- Between major trail forks, if the distance between is over 1 mile

Sources: The bridge icon and the entrance icon used here were recreated from NPS symbols. Other icons were sourced from The Noun Project and the runner's silhouette was sourced from Vecteezy. See Resources.

ADA and Title VI - Our assessment

Here, we provide an assessment of how we've approached ADA and Title VI needs.

Due to project constraints, we were limited in our ability to develop guidelines and changes to support accessibility needs. For people with disabilities and people with limited language proficiency, we were not able to connect with these populations adequately. **It is important to take time to build relationship with marginalized user groups**, rather than work quickly to extract knowledge and experiences from them. Therefore, we recommend that future work on improving accessibility should use co-designing.

Co-designing deserves space in all user experience design projects, but especially for projects that impact marginalized groups. Co-designing is when **the designer and the user work together**, often in the same space in workshop settings, to ideate, model, and prototype solutions. The user takes an active role in these design processes. In this way, co-designing **gives the user the position of expertise and design power**, rather than keeping the designer in the position of power only. For people with marginalized identities, co-designing is **an important way for the designer to support and uplift their voices**. Given the time constraints on our project, we did not have the resources to enact co-designing.

In spite of our limitations, our team did take the following actions:

- Developed an **informed understanding** of ADA and Title VI guidelines **prior** to user research and designing phases
- Implemented **more visuals and universal symbols** to support people with impaired vision and people with limited language proficiency
- Checked for **color contrast** using [WebAIM's Contrast Checker](#)
- Checked for **colorblindness** (red-green, deutanopia) using [Coblis Color Blindness Simulator](#)

We encourage these actions to be taken in the future:

- Enact **co-designing thinking and co-designing practices**. Think about "designing with" rather than "designing for", to **recognize the power and agency that users deserve**
- **Build rapport** and relationships with City of Bellevue parks visitors, making sure to **go beyond extracting knowledge**
- Recognize that accessibility is always a work-in-progress, and look for both practical approaches (**producing a tangible outcome or improvement**) and speculative approaches (**producing inspiration and visions of hopeful futures**).
 - **Speculative design** is another tool that may be used in this work. It is a method of design thinking which encourages the designer to **imagine possible futures of positive social change**, and what steps might be taken to reach those futures.

Resources

Universal symbology from the National Parks Service and Meeker & Associates:

- <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/gisandmapping/map-symbols-patterns-for-nps-maps.htm>
- <http://www.meekerdesigns.com/symbols-and-pictographs/#>

Symbols used from Icons8:

- Sunrise: <https://icons8.com/icon/103393/sunrise>
- Sunset: <https://icons8.com/icon/set/sunset/material-rounded>

Symbols used from the Noun Project:

- Alcohol: martini: <https://thenounproject.com/icon/martini-3852210/>
- Alcohol: wine bottle: <https://thenounproject.com/icon/bottle-wine-2921730/>
- Campfire: <https://thenounproject.com/icon/campfire-4869180/>
- Moon: <https://thenounproject.com/icon/moon-6666146/>
- Loudspeaker: <https://thenounproject.com/icon/loud-5953144/>
- Breaking: <https://thenounproject.com/icon/break-3968745/>
- Farm: <https://thenounproject.com/icon/farm-6714842/>
- Puppy: <https://thenounproject.com/icon/puppy-4332362/>
- Toilet: <https://thenounproject.com/icon/toilet-6758807/>

Symbols used from the Iconify plugin on the Figma design application: fireworks, feeding ducks, littering, trash can, bag, person walking, dog on leash

Silhouette of runner: <https://www.vecteezy.com/vector-art/7496090-female-runner-line-silhouette-collection>



For alternate formats, interpreters, or reasonable modification requests please phone at least 48 hours in advance 425-452-4346 (voice) or email mdegrand@bellevuewa.gov.
For complaints regarding modifications, contact the City of Bellevue ADA, Title VI, and Equal Opportunity Officer at ADATitleVI@bellevuewa.gov.