

# What's the region's second-fastest growing neighborhood? Hint: It's not in Seattle.

**Seattle's South Lake Union, home to Amazon's urban campus, is the region's fastest growing neighborhood. But there's a close second.**

By Gene Falk *Seattle Times columnist*

What's the second fastest growing neighborhood in the Seattle area? If you're a regular reader of this column, you probably already know Seattle's South Lake Union is No. 1. And if you picked Ballard or Capitol Hill as No. 2, those would be good guesses.

But you have to look to the Eastside for the correct answer: Downtown Bellevue.

In a recent column, I looked at patterns of population growth within Seattle since the start of this decade. I heard from a number of readers who wondered about how much the population had changed in their neighborhoods, which are located outside the city.

When looking at growth around the region, the two census tracts that cover downtown Bellevue (west of I-405) jump out. The population increased by more than 5,200 from 2010 to 2017, a 73 percent increase. There are now more than 12,400 people living in this area, which is dotted with a number of new apartment towers, as tall as 450 feet. These two tracts in downtown Bellevue now have a population density of about 18,000 people per square mile — similar, coincidentally, to South Lake Union.

Downtown Bellevue's remarkable growth was made possible by zoning that allows for multifamily housing, and the Bellevue City Council recently approved a plan to further increase density. But much of Bellevue, like much of Seattle, is zoned exclusively for single-family homes, which severely restricts growth. The City Council also impeded population growth with a 2015 regulation prohibiting houses in single-family home neighborhoods to be chopped up into apartments. Bellevue has a shortage of

affordable housing, and the median rent for a one-bedroom apartment is \$1,726, according to Zillow.

Overall, Bellevue grew by about 13 percent from 2010 to 2017, but most of that growth was absorbed by the downtown and Crossroads areas. Many of the city's neighborhoods grew at less than half that rate.

## **Not just Bellevue**

Other parts of our metro area have also seen explosive growth. Central Redmond has seen population increase by more than 50 percent, and so have several Snohomish County census tracts, in Picnic-Point-North Lynnwood, Lake Stickney (near Paine Field) and Bothell. Downtown Everett, where a number of new apartment complexes have been developed, grew nearly as fast.

And while Seattle's growth rate of nearly 19 percent since 2010 ranks No. 1 among major U.S. cities, there are many smaller places that have grown at a faster pace, including some in this area. Gig Harbor, which is in Pierce County, grew by 35 percent in this period, faster than anywhere in the Seattle metro area. Granted, it's a small city, and even with that extraordinary growth, the population still hasn't quite hit 10,000.

Other places in the area that have increased population at a faster rate than Seattle include: Snoqualmie, Issaquah, Carnation, Edgewood and Bonney Lake. And in Covington and Redmond, growth has been just a bit slower. Almost everywhere in the Seattle metro is growing. In the four-county area — King, Snohomish, Pierce and Kitsap — there are more than 750 census tracts. Just eight saw their population decline.

And only one had a significant drop — more than 10 percent of its population. But there's a good explanation. The tract in question, which is in Pierce County, includes McNeil Island, which formerly housed the McNeil Island Corrections Complex. In 2011, the prison was closed down due to state budget cuts, and its population of inmates transferred to other facilities.