# Bellaire Today Report

2023 Comprehensive Plan Review

## INTRODUCTION

This report provides background information about Bellaire as it is today. This information is presented in topic areas relevant to Bellaire's ongoing focus on being a place that is attractive for living, working, investing and boosting one's quality of life.

The report is intended to avoid duplication of existing data profiles about Bellaire already available from other sources. Instead, the facts and figures in this report highlight specific indicators that tell a story about key planning issues facing the community and help put such issues in context. This will set the stage for the Bellaire Tomorrow portion of an updated Comprehensive Plan by capturing key community needs and desires for the next several decades. The content of this Bellaire Today report is based on initial background studies to date by the City's community planning consultant, Kendig Keast Collaborative (of Sugar Land, Texas) as well as leadership and community input to this point.

### Existing City and Future City

Along with a first round of intensive leadership and community engagement, the comprehensive planning process focuses first on providing a snapshot of existing conditions, culminating in this Bellaire Today report. The report includes highlights of Bellaire's history, location and physical characteristics and summarizes current demographic composition and trends. A summary of key indicators, from the latest available U.S. Census data and other sources, illustrates historical and current conditions and provides context relevant to the rest of the planning effort.

### Report Organization

After an initial section on Community Milestones and Heritage, the information in this report is presented in the following topic areas relevant to the City's Comprehensive Plan for guiding Bellaire's future physical development, redevelopment and enhancement:

- People
- Housing
- Work Life
- Transportation
- Public Infrastructure, Facilities and Services

Comparison Communities

While the focus of this report is Bellaire's existing conditions, it can be helpful to benchmark local data points against other communities and geographies to provide additional context. In this report, a handful of other Texas "enclave" cities – relatively small, incorporated communities surrounded by other jurisdictions within a much larger metropolitan area – were used for comparison of certain data points, along with some comparisons to all of Harris County, the State of Texas and the nation:

- Alamo Heights in the San Antonio area;
- Highland Park and University Park in the Dallas area; and
- West University Place adjacent to Bellaire in the Houston area.

These same communities were selected for this purpose in Bellaire's last full comprehensive planning effort in 2008-09, and for an interim plan update in 2015. Along with their similar physical situations, all of these communities are relatively affluent within the Texas context.

**Bellaire Setting and Context**

Bellaire is located in southeast Texas, approximately 50 miles inland from the Gulf of Mexico in southwest Harris County. The Bellaire city limits encompass 3.6 square miles in the central area of the greater Houston metropolitan region, approximately six miles west of downtown Houston. Bellaire has long been an "enclave" city, completely surrounded by West University Place to the east and by the City of Houston, after Houston annexed all remaining unincorporated land around Bellaire in 1949.

Bellaire is bisected by a north-south segment of West Loop 610, and an east-west portion of Interstate 69 is just north of the city – creating one of the busiest freeway interchanges in the state and nation where the two interstate highways cross. Houston's densely developed and amenity-rich Uptown District is immediately north of Bellaire across Interstate 69. Bellaire's location also provides easy access to all of metro Houston and surrounding areas, including other major employment and activity centers such as the Texas Medical Center, Rice University, Greenway Plaza and Houston's Central Business District. George Bush Intercontinental Airport is 21 miles north of Bellaire, and Hobby Airport is 12 miles southeast.

Bellaire lies generally 52 feet above sea level (ranging from 48 to 54 feet in different locations) on the relatively flat Texas coastal plain and, like much of the Houston region, is vulnerable to flooding, having experienced damaging tropical storms and rainfall events throughout its history. At a latitude of 29.7 degrees north of the equator, Bellaire is placed in a warm/mild temperate zone on the globe by the Köppen climate classification system, characterized more locally by a humid subtropical climate. Summer conditions include a moist, maritime airflow amid elevated temperatures while winters are relatively mild. Houston-area weather data over the last 30 years shows average annual rainfall of 52 inches, a mean temperature of 70.5 degrees Fahrenheit, with an average year-around high of 80.5 degrees and low of 60.5 degrees. Such statistics are increasingly in flux due to global climate trends.

SOURCE: City of Bellaire, National Geographic Society, National Weather Service.

**COMMUNITY MILESTONES AND HERITAGE**

**Bellaire Historical Timeline**

[Potential new and post-2000 additions to timeline on Comprehensive Plan pages 1.2-1.3.]

1947 – Mayor Madison Rayburn named Bellaire "The City of Homes."

1981 – New Bellaire City Hall/Civic Center opened at Bellaire Town Square.

1983 – Friends of Bellaire Parks purchased homestead of former Mayor Frank Henshaw (1933-37), developed later as the Nature Discovery Center.

2000 – Bellaire Little League team won U.S. national championship at Little League World Series in Williamsport, Pennsylvania.

2001 – Tropical Storm Allison became most impactful flooding event since 1994 with an estimated 1,423 homes affected, mostly in northeast Bellaire.

2003 – Bellaire Cultural Arts Commission established.

2008 – Hurricane Ike passed through Bellaire and southwest Houston, with 50-60 mph winds and associated rainfall, causing most hurricane damage since Alicia in 1983.

2008 – Bellaire Town Square Family Aquatic Center opened.

2009 – Fourth Comprehensive Plan, prepared by Kendig Keast Collaborative of Sugar Land.

2010 – New Fire Station opened.

2013 – Bellaire voters approved $11 million bond referendum to design and construct a new City Hall/Civic Center and Police Station/Municipal Court building.

2015 – Comprehensive Plan interim update, including to reflect commercial zoning district changes.

2015 – Memorial Day Flood impacted an estimated 228 Bellaire homes.

2016 – "Tax Day" Flood again impacted Bellaire homes in multiple locations.

2017 – Evelyn's Park opened on former site of historic Teas Nursery since 1910, which closed in 2009.

2017 – Comprehensive Plan interim update, in anticipation of Chevron property sale in north Bellaire.

2017 – Epic rainfall associated with Hurricane Harvey caused flooding of an estimated 1,936 homes, mostly in southeast and south central Bellaire.

2018 – New City Hall and Civic Center opened.

2019 – New Police Station and Municipal Court Building opened.

**Texas Historical Commission Markers in Bellaire**

1836 Texian capture of Mexican dispatchers to San Jacinto ("Deaf" Smith marker in Paseo Park near 2nd Street, added in 1991).

1910-1927 Bellaire Streetcar Line (added in 1993 in Paseo Park between S. Rice Avenue and 3rd Street).

1910 Teas Nursery Company, Bellaire's first business, moved from Missouri to newly-built Bellaire Boulevard, in part to carry out landscaping plans for the new community planned on former Westmoreland Farms land (added in 1993, now within Evelyn's Park).

1919 Bellaire Presbyterian Church (added in 1994 near Bellaire Boulevard and 3rd Street).

1949 City Hall, Community Center and Library (added in 1991 at Bellaire Town Square, site of current municipal facilities).

SOURCE: Texas Historical Commission, Bellaire Historical Society, BellaireBook.com, Texas State Historical Association (Texas Almanac).

Local Bellaire history markers provided by the Bellaire Historical Society are in other locations such as:

- Site of 1910 first one-room school, which also served as a town meeting hall (near Cedar and 3rd streets).
- Site of 1911 Bellaire Trolley Station and Pavilion (in Paseo Park near S. Rice Avenue)
- Site of 1914 original Bellaire School (on Condit Elementary block).
- Site of 1929 general store and post office (near Cedar Street and S. Rice Avenue).

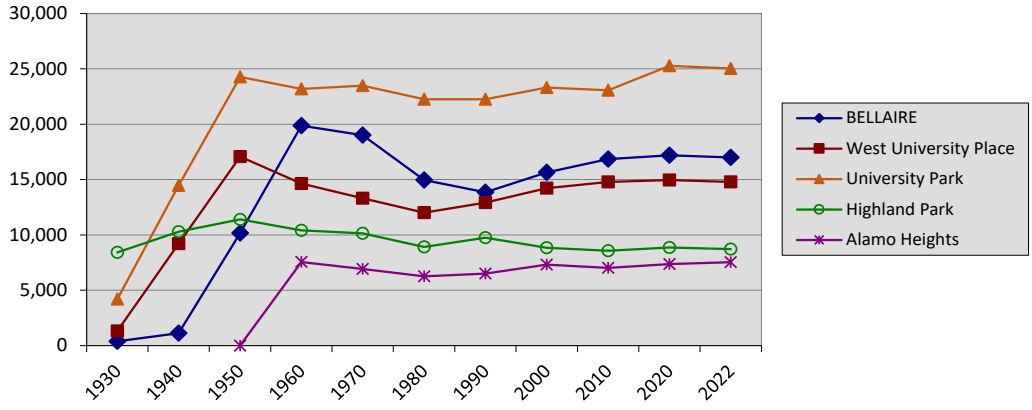
SOURCE: Bellaire Historical Society, Bellaire Cultural Arts Commission.

Bellaire does not have any officially designated historic districts nor any sites listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION about Bellaire's founding and history**, sources include the websites and/or social media sites of the Bellaire Historical Society, Bellaire Civic Club, BellaireBook.com, Friends of the Bellaire Library, the City of Bellaire Visitor Information webpage and links to other sources on those sites.

## PEOPLE

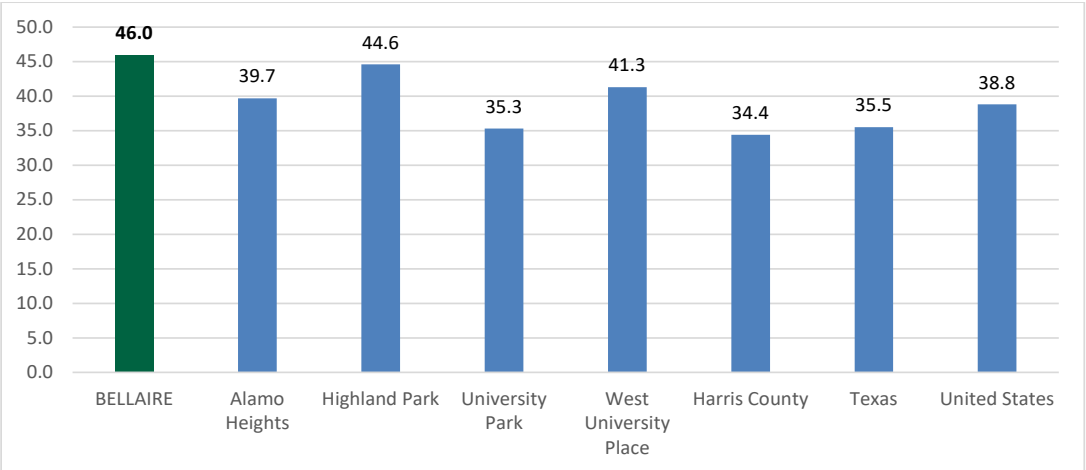
### Population History and Estimates




SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau.

- **16,991** is the **newest available population estimate** for Bellaire, from July 2022.
- **17,202** was Bellaire's Census 2020 count, up from 16,855 in 2010 (2.1% growth) and 15,642 in 2000 (10% growth from 2000 to 2020).

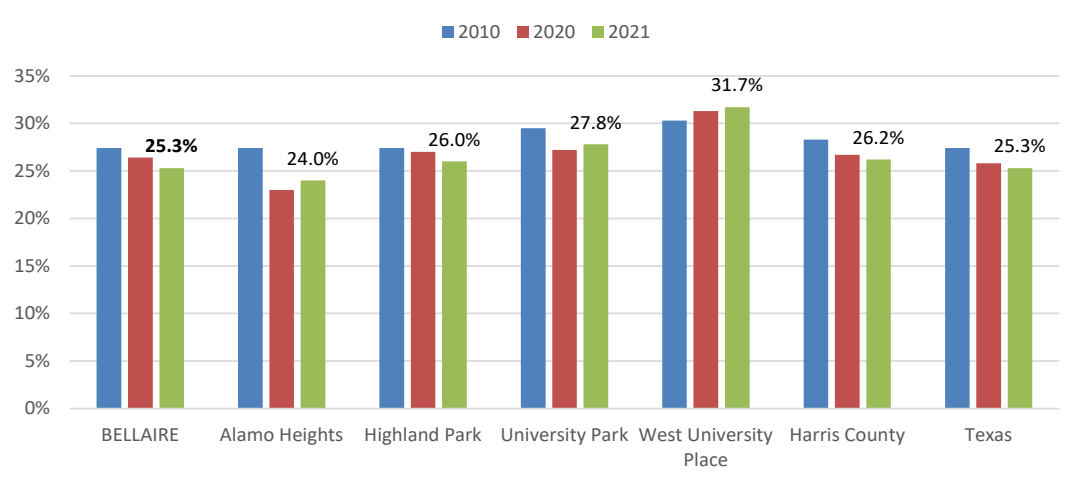
### Median Age



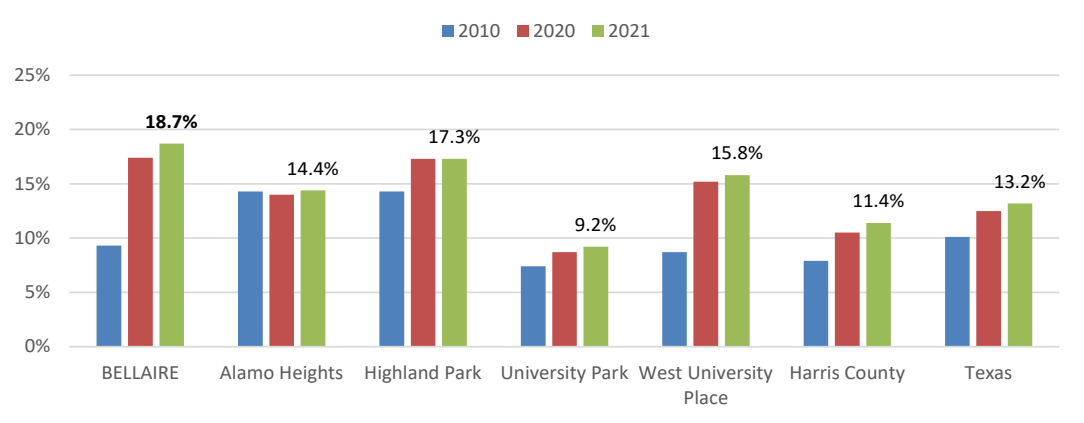

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2021 5-Year Estimates (Table S0101).

- An estimated **median age of 46 years** in 2021 made Bellaire the highest among the comparison geographies.
- This was up from a median age of 41.6 years in Census 2010, when Texas had a median age of 33.6 years.

**Population Under Age 18**



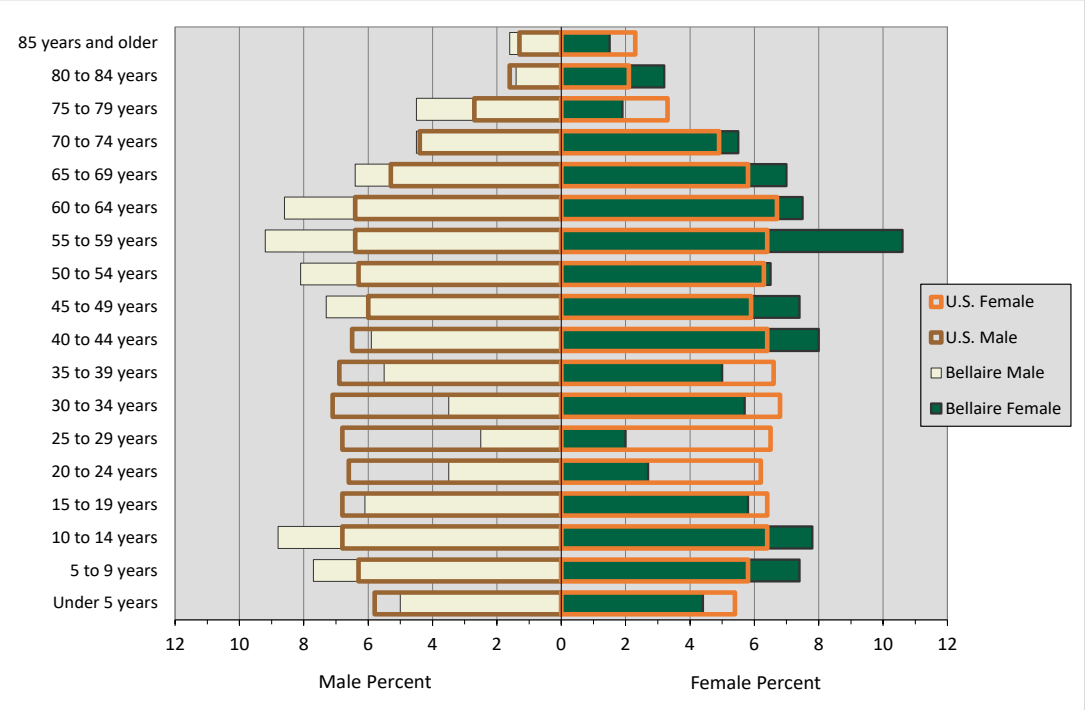

**Population 65 Years and Over**




SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2021 5-Year Estimates (Table S0101).

- Bellaire's **share of youth population has been declining** since 2010, reaching an estimated **25.3%** in 2021.
- Meanwhile, Bellaire's **share of age 65+ population has increased substantially** since 2010, to an estimated **18.7%** in 2021 – giving Bellaire the highest share among the comparison geographies.

## Age and Gender Distribution



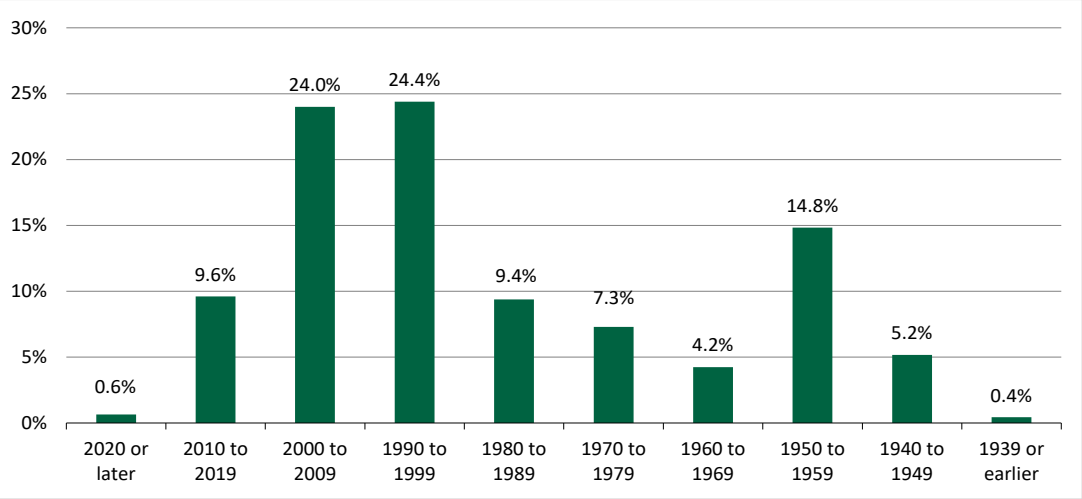

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2021 5-Year Estimates (Table S0101).

The comparison to the nationwide age and gender distribution, estimated for 2021, shows that:

- Bellaire had a **lower share in the youngest age group, under age 5**, but Bellaire had **more youth in the age 5-14 range**.
- As in Census 2010, Bellaire's **young adult population in the age 20-39 range was substantially lower** than the U.S. distribution, reflective of Bellaire's estimated median age.
- Bellaire's population shares were **higher in all age groupings between age 45 and 69**, including in the typical prime earning years from age 45 to 64 as in Census 2010.

## HOUSING

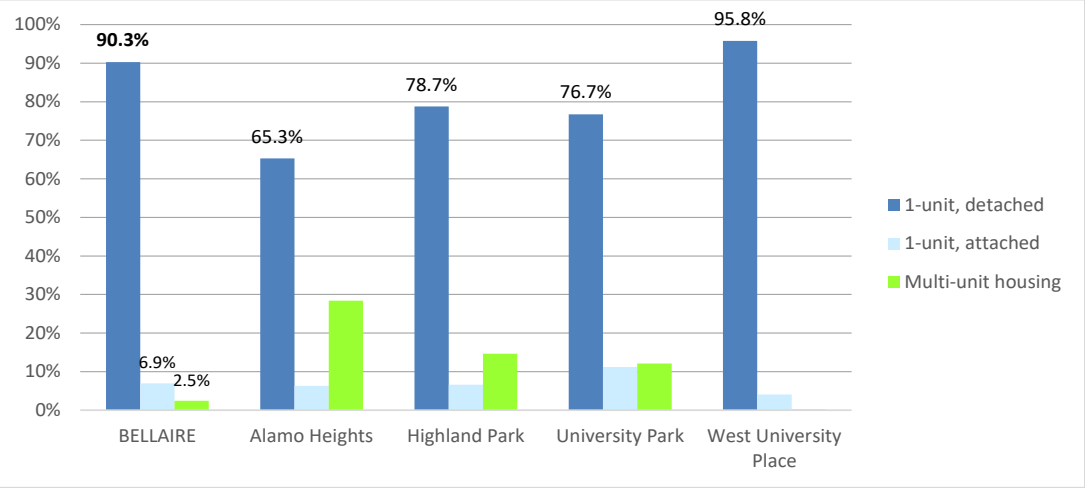
### Timeframe When Housing Built




SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2021 5-Year Estimates (Table B25034).

- **6,928** was the **newest estimated housing unit count** for Bellaire, as of 2021. This was up from 6,309 units counted in Census 2000, and 6,519 as of Census 2010.
- Of that total, **58.6% of housing units had been built since 1990**, the decade in which the teardown/rebuild wave accelerated in Bellaire. This compares to a 2012 estimate of 48.9% built since 1990.
- According to these estimates, Bellaire had **just under 400 homes (5.6%) still from 1949 or earlier** as of 2021 compared to an estimated 12.1% in 2012.

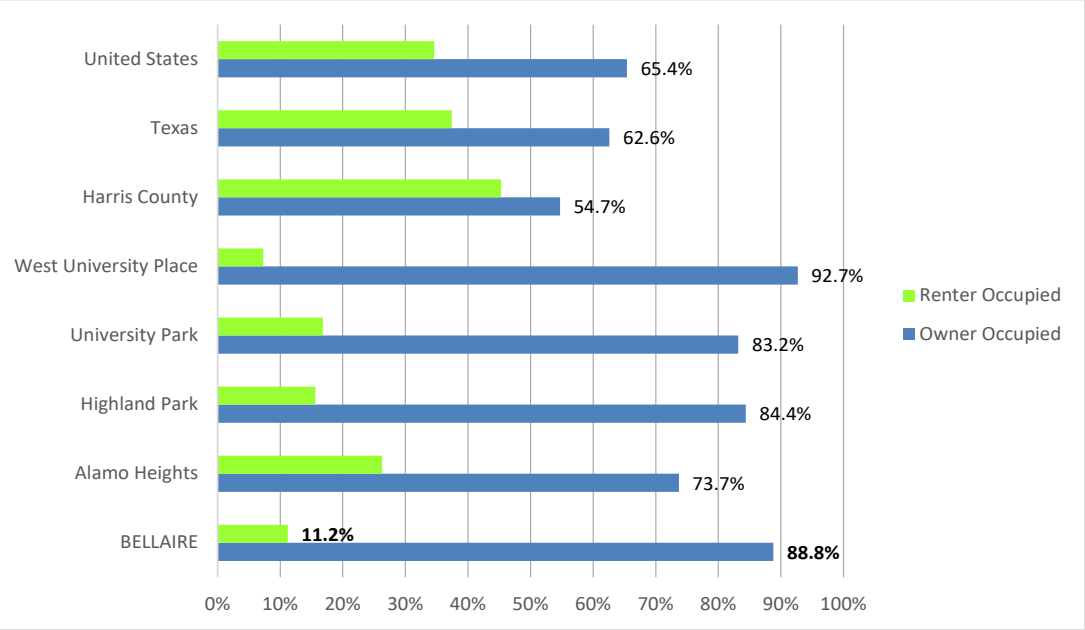
## Housing Types




SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2021 5-Year Estimates (Table S2504).

- **90.3% of Bellaire's housing was estimated to be in single-family detached homes** as of 2021, the highest among the comparison communities other than West University Place at 95.8%**.**

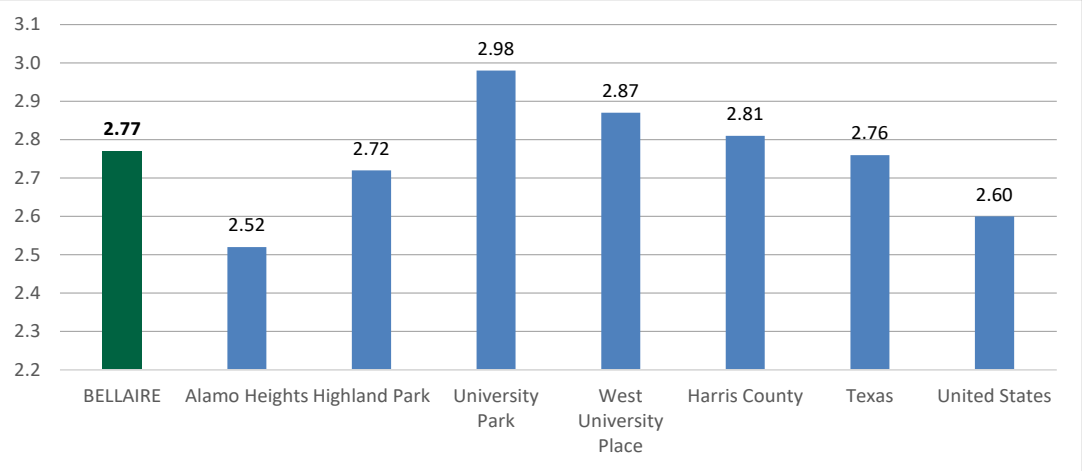
**Owner- versus Renter-Occupied Housing**




SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2021 5-Year Estimates (Table S1101).

- **88.8% of Bellaire's housing was estimated to be owner-occupied** as of 2021, with only West University Place having a higher share among the comparison geographies. Bellaire's owner-occupied share was down only slightly from a 2012 estimate of 89.3%.
- The fact that only 9.4% of Bellaire's housing stock was attached or multi-unit housing in 2021, as shown on the previous chart, while 11.2% was renter-occupied means that some amount of single-family detached homes in Bellaire are also being rented.

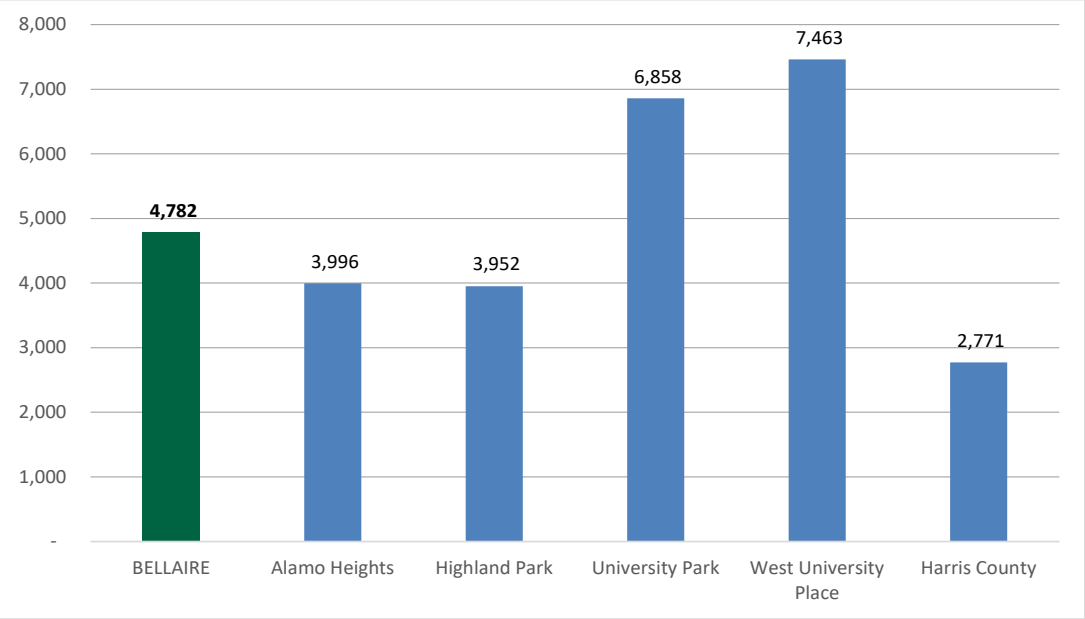
**Average Household Size**




SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2021 5-Year Estimates (Table S1101).

- **2.77** was the **average household size** in Bellaire based on 2021 estimates. This was effectively unchanged from Census 2010 when the Bellaire average was 2.78.
- However, the 2021 figure of 2.77 was an **increase from a 2.58 average household size for Bellaire in Census 2000**, when Bellaire's population count was 15,642 compared to an estimated 17,202 in Census 2020.

**Population Density** (persons per square mile)

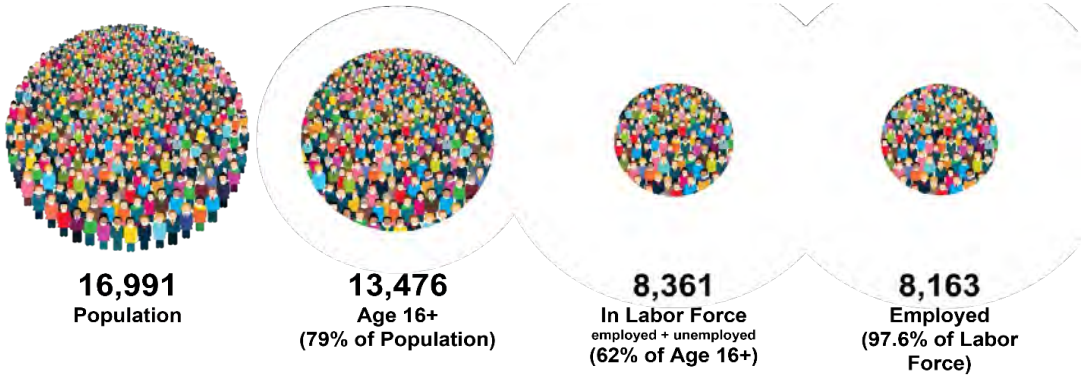



SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau.

- With **4,782 persons per square mile** as of Census 2020, Bellaire was in the middle of the pack among the comparison communities. The population density in West University Place is significantly higher given smaller lot sizes in many areas plus the extent of larger estate-size lots in portions of Bellaire.
- Population density increased across all the comparison geographies since 2010, reflecting a period of ongoing urbanization in Texas. Bellaire's population density was 4,692 persons per square mile in Census 2010, approximately 2% lower than in 2020.

## WORK LIFE

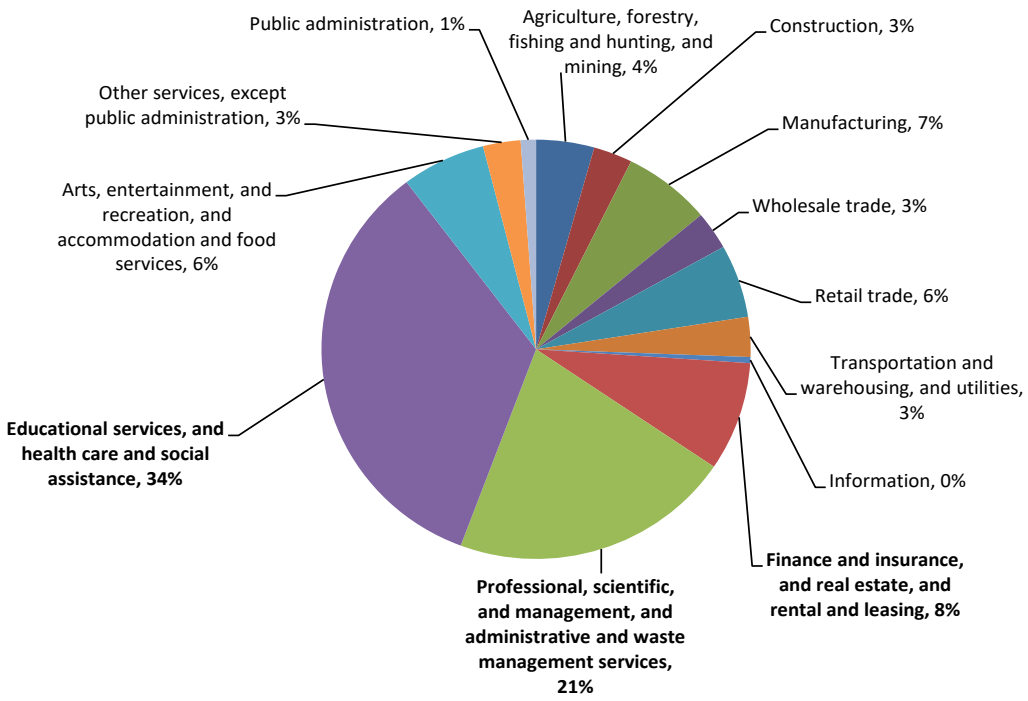
### Labor Force Participation and Employment




SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2021 5-Year Estimates (Table DP03).

- Of the estimated 2021 Bellaire population that was age 16 or over, **62% were participating in the labor force** by working or actively seeking work – and **nearly 98% of those were employed**, indicating a very low unemployment rate at the time. Likely reflecting an aging population since, Bellaire's labor force number was higher in 2010 at 9,081 (from roughly the same total population size), with 8,747 of those individuals employed.
- Bellaire's 2021 labor force participation rate was nearly identical to 63% nationwide, but Harris County at the time had a higher participation rate of 67%, and statewide was 64.6%.

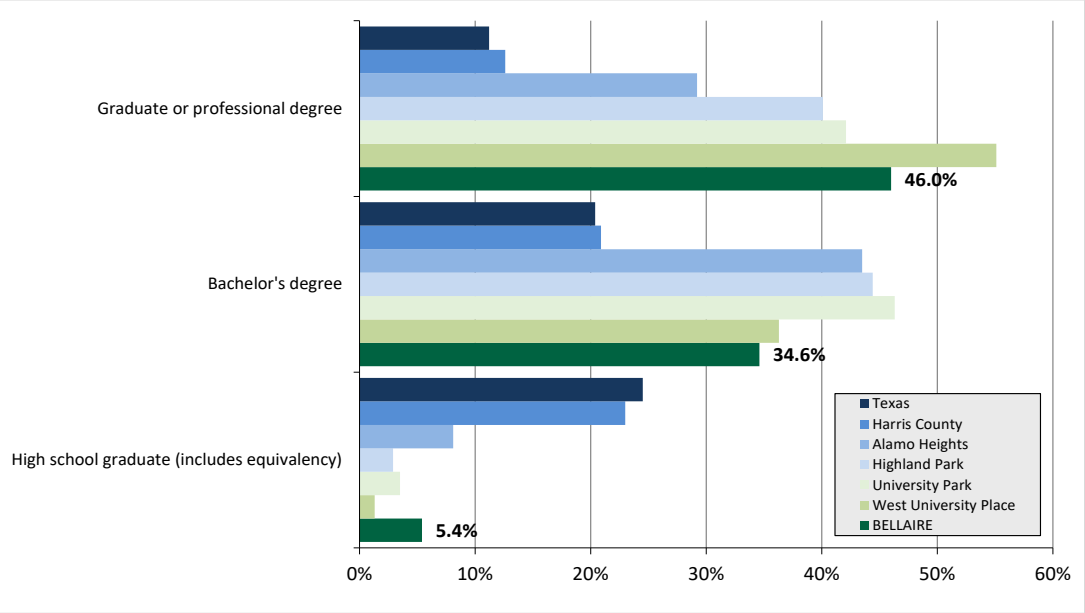
## Employment by Industry Type




SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2021 5-Year Estimates (Table DP03).

- The chart above shows that, for Bellaire's civilian employed population 16 years and over in 2021, **nearly two-thirds (63%) were working in the three industry sectors with bold labels on the chart**.
- This was effectively unchanged from an estimated 62% share in 2012, although the **Education/Health Care/Social Services category has increased its leading share** from 28% to 34%.
- By comparison, for the employed population statewide, the Education/Health Care/Social Services category also employed the most workers but with a lower 21% share, followed by Professional/Scientific/Management at 12.5%. Next highest for all of Texas were Retail Trade (11.2%), Manufacturing (8.7%), Construction (8.5%) and Arts/Entertainment/Recreation+ (8.3%).

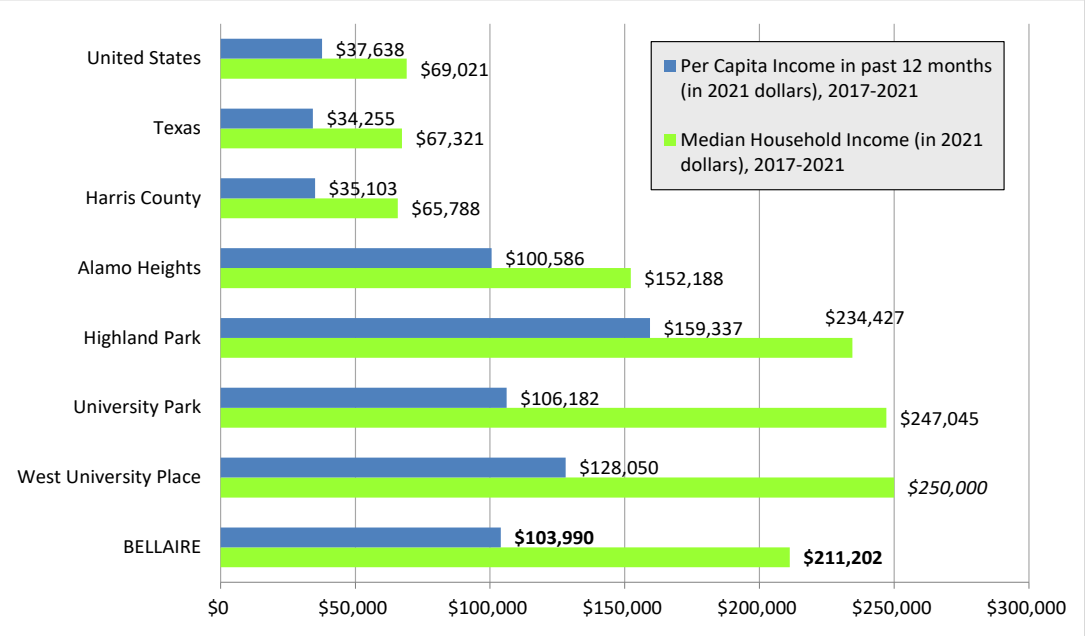
## Highest Education Level Attained




SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2021 5-Year Estimates (Table S1501).

- **46%** of Bellaire's estimated 2021 population 25 years and over **had earned a graduate or professional degree**, second only to West University Place among the comparison geographies.
- The **combined percentage of bachelor's degrees and graduate/professional degrees earned among Bellaire's age 25+ population was 80.6%** in 2021, down from an estimated 85.8% in 2012.
- Bellaire and its comparison enclave cities clearly stand apart in terms of educational attainment relative to the Harris County and statewide attainment numbers.

## Income

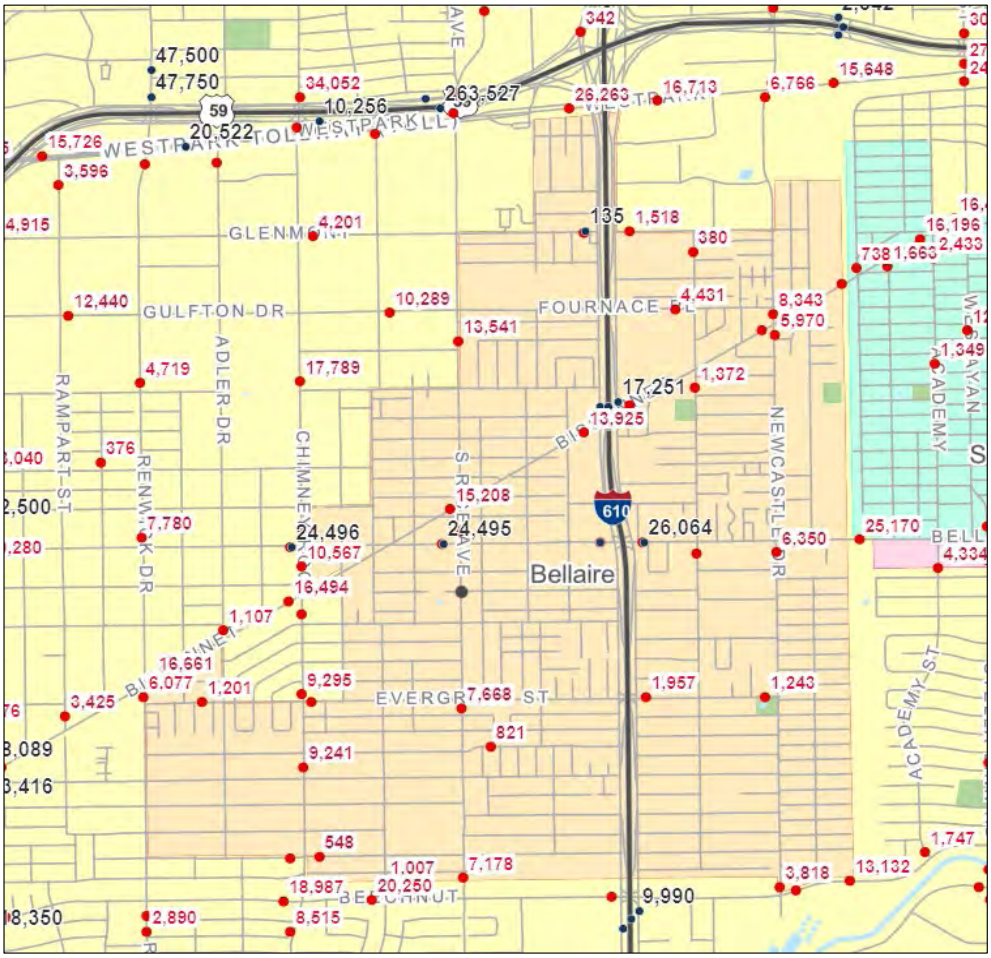



SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2021 5-Year Estimates (Table S1901, B19301).
NOTE: The median household income for West University Place is not a specific figure as it was in the uppermost "$250,000+" range.

- The estimated **2021 median household income in Bellaire was just over $211,000**, which was more than three times the median amounts for Harris County, all of Texas and the nation.
- Although inflation must be factored in, the 2012 estimates for Bellaire were $76,732 per capita income (third highest at the time versus fourth now among the five comparison cities) and $154,424 median household income (still fourth highest as in 2012).

## TRANSPORTATION

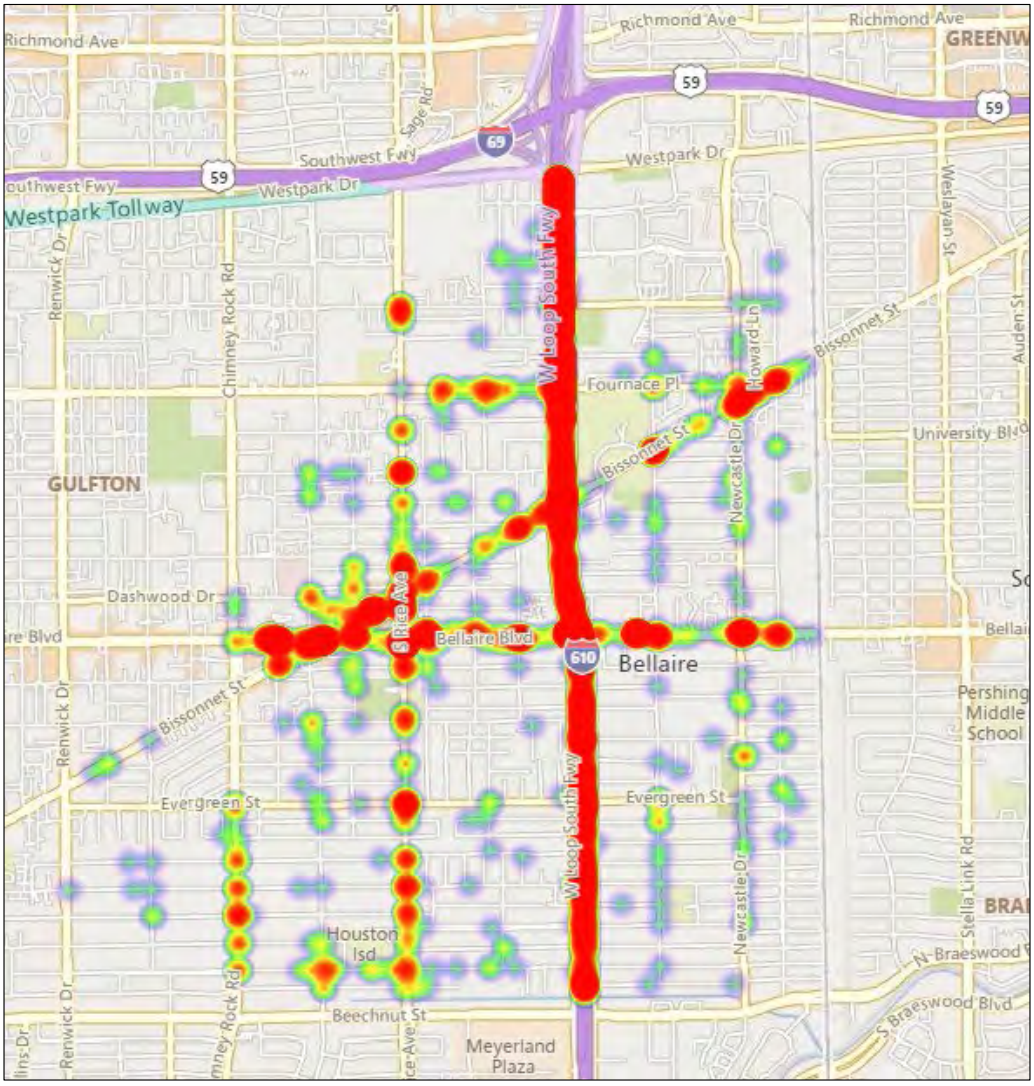
### Traffic Volumes in and around Bellaire




SOURCE: Texas Department of Transportation.
NOTE: Black points are Average Annual Daily Traffic (AADT) numbers for 2022. Red points are 5-year averages through 2021.

- Although not labeled on the map above, AADT of approximately **33,500 on Bellaire Boulevard, just west of West Loop 610, was the highest daily traffic volume number within Bellaire the last few years**. AADTs from 2021-22 may still reflect some anomalies due to changes in driving habits during the COVID pandemic, but they do provide a sense of the area roadways that carry the highest relative traffic volumes.
- Just inside West Loop 610 on Bellaire Boulevard, AADT slightly above 26,000 was recorded. AADT in the 25,500 range was reported farther west on Bellaire Boulevard, just past S. Rice Avenue.
- AADT of 17,250 on Bissonnet Street near West Loop 610 was the next highest location in the city, followed by slightly lower amounts on the segment of Bissonnet just west of Chimney Rock.

**Crash Locations** (2017-2022)




SOURCE: Texas Department of Transportation - Crash Records Information System.

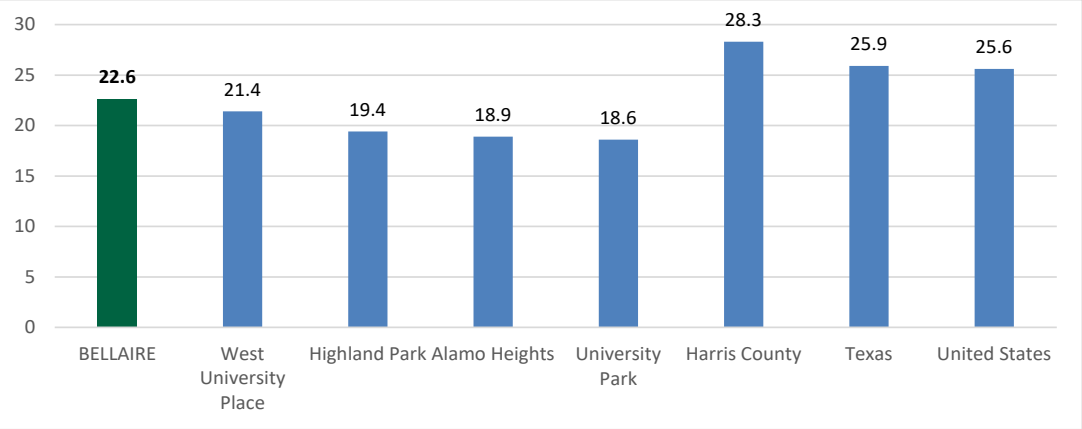
- The "heat map" visualization above depicts concentrations of crashes **between 2017 and 2022** on West Loop 610, along major roads and at other locations in Bellaire. The map reflects **3,748 crashes** documented in the system during these years. The Bellaire Police Department reported responding to investigate 551 crash scenes in 2021 and 437 in 2020.
- Aside from the obvious crash risk and frequency on Loop 610, a next tier of **"hot spot" locations** were **along Bellaire Boulevard and Bissonnet Street, especially where they intersect in Bellaire's west side City Center area**. A third level of crash frequency was along S. Rice Avenue (including in the Bellaire High School vicinity), Fournace just west of Loop 610, and along Chimney Rock in southwest Bellaire.

**Commuting Patterns** (2020)

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau - OnTheMap resource.

- Bellaire had **48% more inbound than outbound commuters** in 2020. Of course, since this data only becomes available several years later, the newest available data is from the height of the COVID pandemic. Future data releases should indicate whether commuting volumes and directions have returned to traditional patterns or if a "new normal" is here to stay. Undoubtedly, more than 300 Bellaire residents ended up working from home from 2020 into 2021 during the pandemic years.
- The 2020 numbers indicate that **96% of Bellaire's employed residents traveled outside the city to their place of work**. Employment **locations in Houston were by far the most common destination of outbound Bellaire commuters** at 71.2%. The next largest destination was Sugar Land at 2.1%. Various other scattered locations were all 1% or less.
- The **largest share of workers employed in Bellaire in 2020 were also from Houston** (38.1%). Aside from the 2.7% of local jobs held by Bellaire residents, the next largest geographic origins of inbound workers were Pearland (2.3%), Sugar Land (1.8%) and Missouri City (1.8%). Various others were all 1% or less.
- Along with other draws that bring daily and weekend visitors to Bellaire (shopping and services, health care, education, restaurants, parks and recreation, special events, etc.), these inbound commute figures indicate the extent of additional wear and tear on area roadways – plus other public service demands – the City must address given a **much higher daytime population versus Bellaire's actual resident population**.

**Average Travel Time to Work** (in minutes for workers 16 years and over)




SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2021 5-Year Estimates (Table DP03).

- As was the case nearly 10 years earlier in 2012, **Bellaire residents had the highest average travel time to work, estimated at 22.6 minutes** in 2021, compared to the other four peer Texas communities. But, all of these centrally-located enclave cities offer some measure of time savings in daily commutes relative to the much larger commuter populations at the county, statewide and national levels.
- The 2021 average travel time to work for Bellaire commuters of 22.6 minutes was **up from 18.6 minutes a decade earlier** – though previous improvements to West Loop 610 and other area freeways had likely contributed to reducing the travel time from 21.7 minutes in 2000.
- Related journey-to-work estimates show that, as of 2021, **75.6% of Bellaire workers drove to work alone**, second only to Alamo Heights at 86.3% (University Park lowest at 70.2%). On the other hand, **Bellaire had the highest share of workers using public transportation** at 1.3% (University Park next highest at 0.7%), up from only 0.4% in 2012. Another 5.6% of Bellaire commuters carpooled in 2021, 0.4% walked to work and 0.8% used a bike or other means. These 2021 data also must be flagged for potential pandemic effects, especially as an estimated 84.7% of Bellaire workers were driving alone to work in 2012 and 7.9% shared their vehicles with other carpoolers.
- With another significant caution about comparing data estimates across years and sources, the journey-to-work estimates show that, **by 2021, 16.2% of employed Bellaire residents were working at home (approximately 1,300 individuals)** compared to only 5.1% in 2012. Bellaire's 2021 percentage was exactly the same as for West University Place and similar to University Park, while Highland Park was up to 19.1% and Alamo Heights at 10.3%.

## PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE, FACILITIES AND SERVICES

Bellaire City departments report on a range of municipal functions and performance indicators, including the following statistics of interest from 2021:

Public Safety

- 29,094 calls for service handled by Police Department dispatch.
- 203-second response time (3 minutes, 23 seconds) by Police Department to top-priority calls, from dispatch to arrival on scene.
- 1,834 emergency responses by Fire Department.
- 5:05 average response time by Fire Department (with a goal to arrive at 90% of all incidents, and at 95% of emergency medical services incidents, within four minutes).

Utility Infrastructure

- 2.22 million gallons of average daily water consumption, with peak daily consumption of 4.21 million gallons – resulting in 809.7 million gallons of total annual consumption.
- 66% of water supply from surface water and 34% from well water – the highest share from surface water over the last decade amid an ongoing transition away from ground water reliance across the region to reduce land surface subsidence.
- 1.11 million gallons of average daily sewage treatment, with peak daily treatment of 2.75 million gallons (relative to wastewater treatment capacity of 4.5 million gallons per day) – resulting in 401.5 million gallons of total annual sewage treatment.

Other City Services

- 21% of residential waste diverted to recycling.
- 22,885 visits to Bellaire City Library, with circulation of 110,976 for physical items from the library collection and 29,273 for digital media.

Scale of Infrastructure and Facility Maintenance

- Police and fire stations, along with other municipal facilities.
- 67 miles of streets and 1,036 streetlights – with 83% of paved lane miles assessed in 2021 rated satisfactory by Public Works.
- 73 miles of water system mains.
- 3.23 million gallons of water storage capacity.
- 764 fire hydrants.
- 70 miles of sanitary sewer lines, leading to the City's wastewater treatment facility.
- 49 miles of storm sewer lines.
- 1.32 miles of open ditch/creek/canal drainage.
- 14 City parks, encompassing 121.3 acres of public parkland.
- Recreation Center and other facilities (e.g., aquatics, sports courts and fields, etc.).

The City's preliminary proposed budget for fiscal year 2024 (as of late July 2023) indicates potential maintenance expenditures of $1.76 million from the General Fund across a variety of municipal functions, with park maintenance and building maintenance continuing to be the most significant costs. This figure would be an increase from $1.5 million spent in fiscal year 2022 and a projected total of $1.69 million for

the current fiscal year. For the new fiscal year, an additional $647,800 in maintenance dollars would be allocated from a separate special Fund that covers the City's water, wastewater and solid waste services.

The proposed next annual budget also reconfirms the community's three highest service priorities in terms of potential General Fund allocations:

- $7.94 million for police functions (30.6% of $25.9 million total in General Fund recurring expenditures).
- $4.52 million for parks, recreation and facilities (17.4%).
- $4.12 million for fire functions (15.9%).

As noted above, other special "Funds" besides the General Fund are the primary support for the City's essential water, wastewater and solid waste services (including recycling). In the proposed budget, the City's Enterprise Fund includes potential annual operating expenses of $4.2 million for water; $1.75 million for solid waste; and $1.71 million for wastewater. One of the City's highest costs on behalf of residents, businesses and other users is for water purchases, projected at $2.68 million for the new fiscal year.

The proposed budget also shows total potential appropriations of $11.68 million in capital funds for implementation of the 2024 portion of the City's five-year Capital Improvements Plan (CIP). Projects covered would involve upgrades to parks, water and wastewater lines and other system components, storm drainage, fire hydrants, streets and sidewalks, traffic signals, various municipal/recreation buildings, and ADA accessibility improvements at parks, along with vehicle, equipment and technology purchases. The CIP is funded through allocations from the City's General Fund and Enterprise Fund, proceeds and interest earnings from past voter-approved bonds (for specific projects), grants received for certain projects, and through the City's METRO Fund. Along with other area cities, Bellaire continues to receive annual allocations of METRO Mobility funds – projected at $1,737,000 for fiscal year 2024 – which the City then directs to local transportation improvements, along with interest earnings on its METRO Fund balances.