

THE BELLINGHAM PLAN

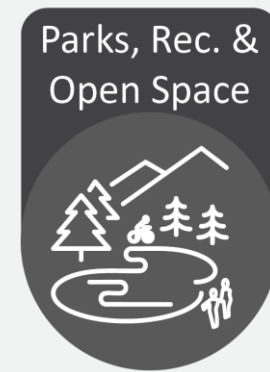
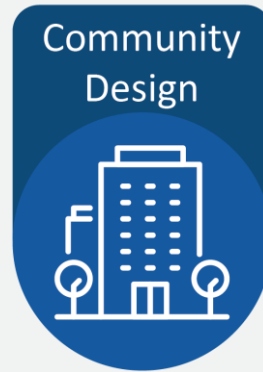


Land Use & Housing

February 20, 2025

Plan Chapters and Planning Commission Discussion

More Housing
Choice: 2/20-3/26



Sustainable
Growth: 5/15-5/29



Climate
Resilience: 4/3

Bellingham for All:
4/17-5/1

* 3 New Chapters

Today's Focus

Land Use

An icon depicting a map with a magnifying glass over a building, symbolizing land use planning.

Housing

An icon showing a row of houses, representing housing.

Community Design

An icon of a multi-story building, representing community design.

Capital Facilities

An icon of a school building, representing capital facilities.

Transportation

An icon showing a bus, a bicycle, and a car, representing transportation.

Parks, Rec. & Open Space

An icon of a park with trees and a path, representing parks, recreation, and open space.


Climate

An icon of a house with solar panels and a wind turbine, representing climate.

Environment

An icon of a globe with a tree, representing the environment.

Civic Practices

An icon of a house with people, representing civic practices.

Community Wellbeing

An icon of hands holding people, representing community wellbeing.

Economic Development

An icon of a hand holding a dollar sign, representing economic development.

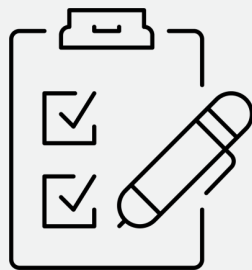
Goals for Today



Become familiar with *the overview of the Land Use and Housing Chapters.*



Discuss *housing-related topics with most significant changes.*



Identify *any additional questions or information needed.*

Agenda

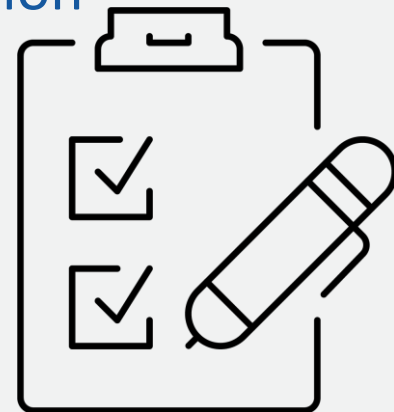
Today's Agenda

- Recap of past conversations
- Land Use Chapter Outline
- Housing Chapter Outline
- Topics to highlight (interspersed)
 - Land Uses: Residential, Human Services
 - More Housing Types
 - Planning for All Incomes
 - Emergency Housing

(March 6: Community Design)

March 20 Agenda

- Citywide Planning
- Small-scale Commercial Uses
- Land Use Map
- Annexation and UGA Planning
- Transit Corridors
- Follow-ups to 2/20 Discussion



Proposed Process & Schedule for 2025

1. Staff drafts Plan (underway)

2. Planning Commission reviews drafted material (February – May)

3. Planning Commission public hearing and recommendation to City Council (July – August)

4. City Council public hearing, discussion, and final plan approval (September – November)

Other Boards and Commissions provide feedback on relevant drafted material to Planning Commission between Steps 1 and 2.

Community Development Advisory Board (CDAB) met on February 13

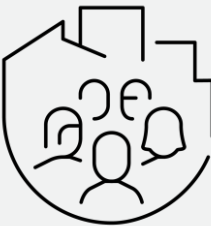
CDAB Comments



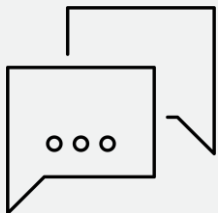
Interest in opportunities for mixed-income projects



Concern about food deserts, including maps that address walksheds

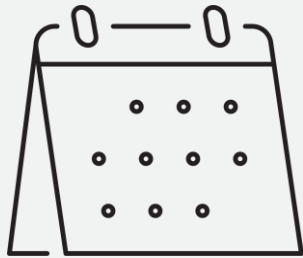


Desire to see more engaged community members and associations



Importance of language access

Future Opportunities for Discussion



March 27: Additional meeting to follow up on Land Use, Housing, or Community Design as needed (only held if needed)



Summer Planning Commission meetings to discuss EIS and especially the Land Use Map in more detail



Summer public hearing and recommendation to City Council

Past Discussion: Middle Housing (6/20/24)



HB 1110: Middle Housing Types



Cottage Housing



Courtyard Housing



Stacked Flats



Fiveplex/Sixplex



Townhouses



Duplex



Triplex



Fourplex

Bellingham “must allow at least **six of the nine** types of middle housing to achieve the unit density required in [the four units per lot section]”

Infill Toolkit: Middle Housing Types



Cottages



Garden/Shared Courtyard



Small Lot



ADU (Not ITK but allowed in all RS and RM Zones)



Townhouses



Duplex



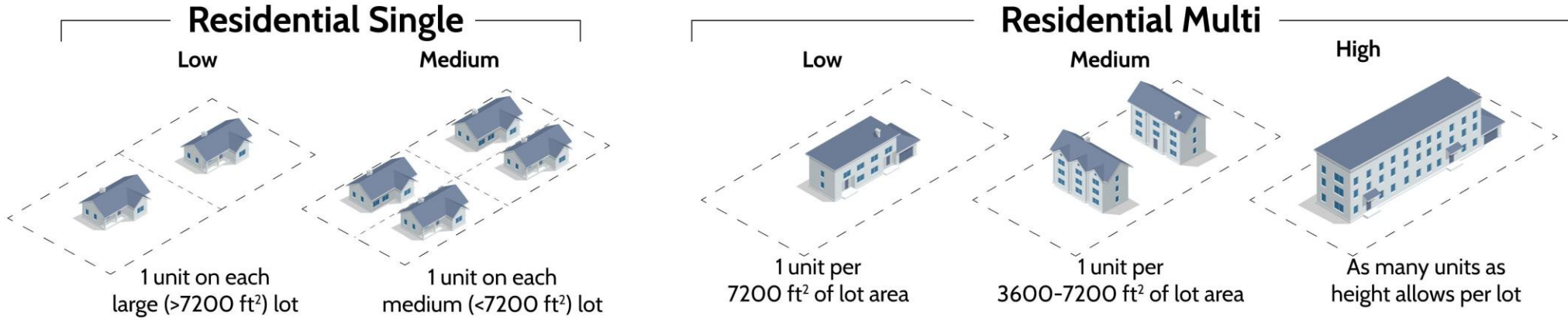
Triplex



Fourplex

EXISTING ZONING

Focused on the number of units allowed based on site size



Washington State HB 1110 requires at least 4 units and a variety of types to be allowed per lot.

POSSIBLE NEW RESIDENTIAL APPROACH

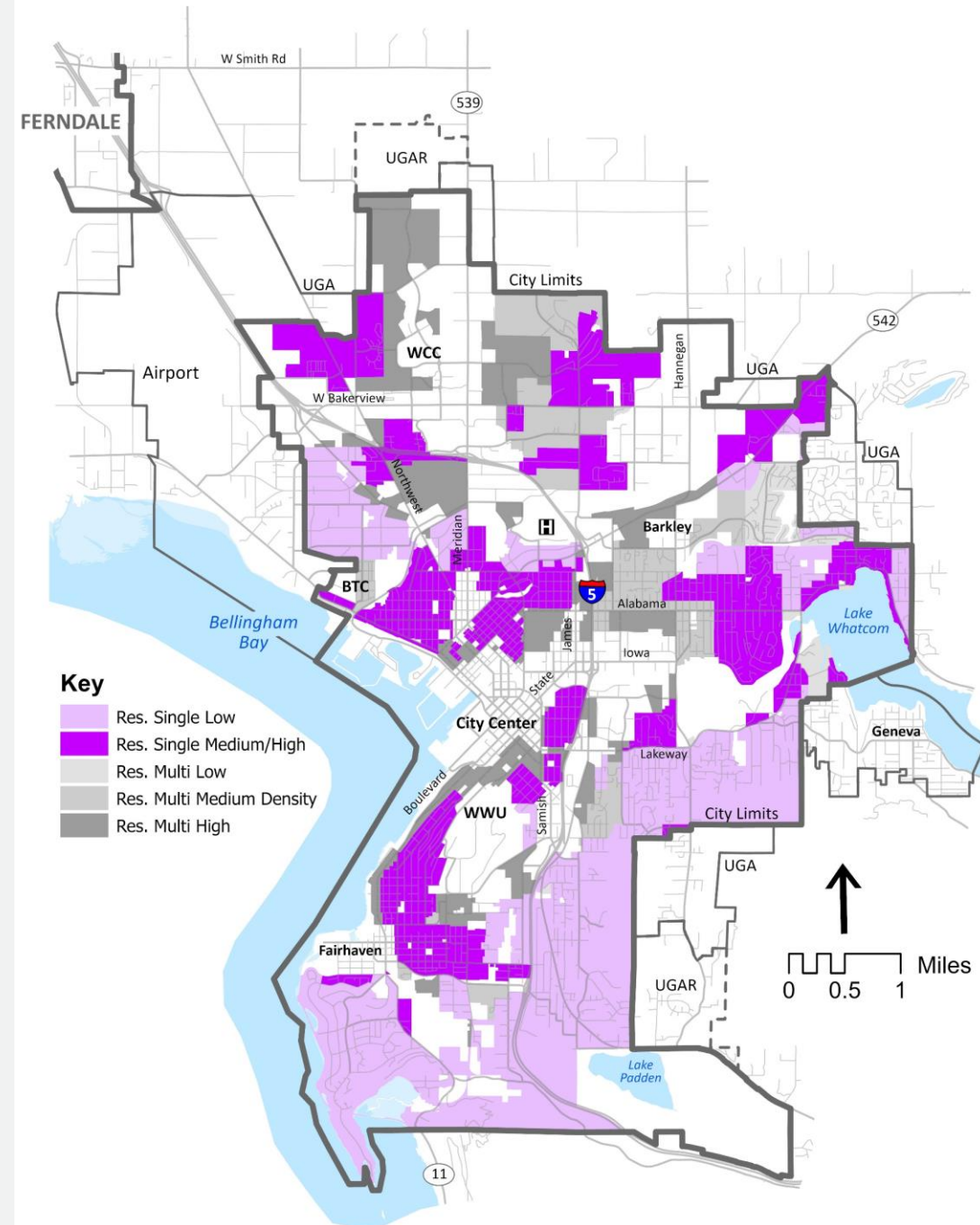
This means we need to re-think how we consider density and bulk in residential areas across the city.

Focused on the size, type, and scale of housing for each area



Existing Single Family Zoning

- HB 110 primary impact: Existing residential single areas
- Existing differentiation between low and medium RS areas
- Residential areas could be simplified, including RM
- Planning Commission and City Council weighed in on this, directing staff to consistently treat existing Residential Single zones in the future



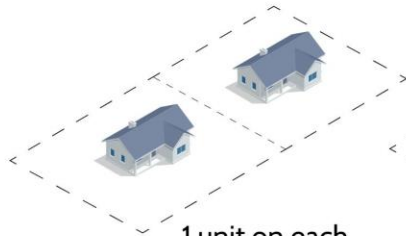
EXISTING ZONING

Focused on the number of units allowed based on site size

Residential Single

Low

Medium



1 unit on each large (>7200 ft²) lot



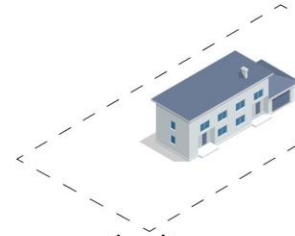
1 unit on each medium (<7200 ft²) lot

Residential Multi

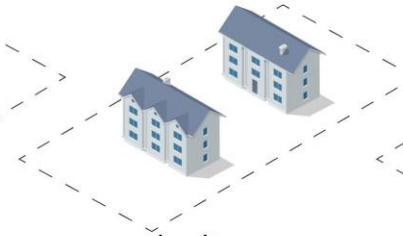
Low

Medium

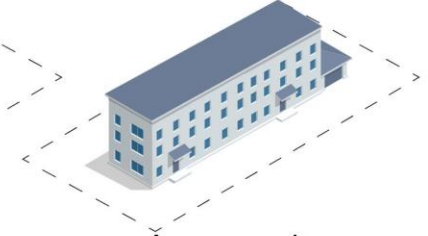
High



1 unit per 7200 ft² of lot area



1 unit per 3600-7200 ft² of lot area



As many units as height allows per lot



Washington State HB 1110 requires at least 4 units and a variety of types to be allowed per lot.

This means we need to think how we consider density and building residential areas across the city.

POSSIBLE NEW RESIDENTIAL APPROACH

Focused on the size, type, and scale of housing for each area

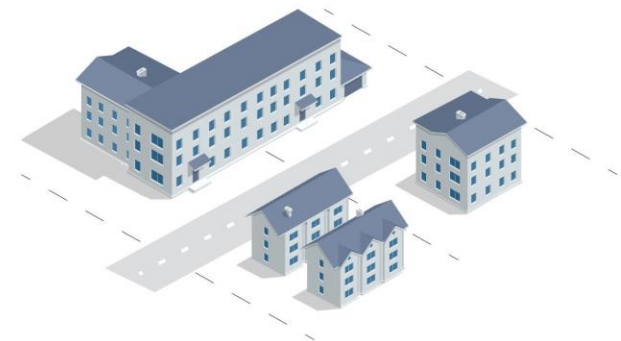
Residential Low



Residential Medium



Residential High



Past Discussion: Residential Density (9/5/24)

RS and RM in Lake Whatcom Watershed

RW (Residential Watershed) low density with no minimum required, RS detached, or RM allowed (based on today's RS and RM zones) with no ITK and no ADUs.

All other RS Zones and RM Low Density

R1 (Residential Low) low density with minimum required, RS, ITK, ADUs allowed

All RM Medium Density

R2 (Residential Medium) medium density with minimum required, RM, ITK, ADUs, and limited RS

All RM High Density

R3 (Residential High) high density with minimum required, RM, ITK, ADUs, and limited RS

Future Transit-Oriented Development Corridors and other focused areas of higher density mixed use development

R4 (Residential TOD) high density / (FAR) with minimum required, future Transit-Oriented Development Corridors and other focused areas of higher density mixed use development

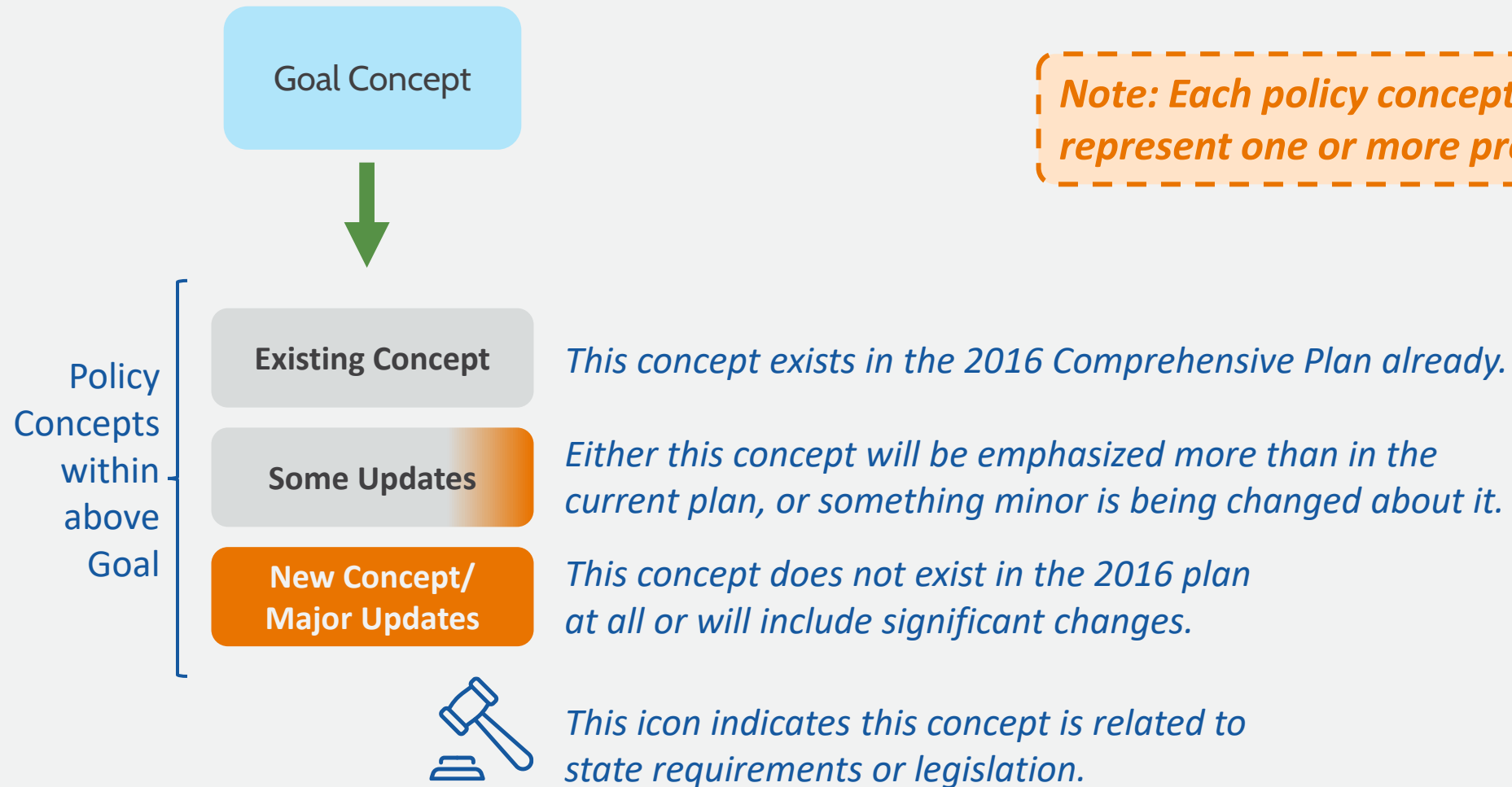
Note: "low" etc density will be defined in code process, not in policies



The slides that follow are available online for public viewing and comment. Additional slides for Planning Commission discussion are interspersed.



Chapter Outline Guide





What the Community Said

These descriptions summarize the most common opinions we heard relevant to this chapter.

We should develop more around our transit corridors and in our Urban Villages. More transit service over time will be important.

We need more mixed-use neighborhoods.

Some small businesses would be great in our residential neighborhoods, but we are worried about parking and noise impacts.

It is important to be able to walk (or sometimes bike or bus) to some essential places, especially for groceries and other food.

New commercial areas or Urban Villages could help fill gaps in the community, especially in the north part of the city.

We are worried about expanding into and removing natural areas if our city boundaries increase.

We want to make sure that the changes to our residential areas are equitable and affect all neighborhoods similarly.



2016 Land Use Chapter Topics

The 2016 Comprehensive Plan Land Use Chapter is organized around these 7 topics. Each one is written as a goal in the plan.

Residential
Development

Urban Villages
& Transit Corridors

Commercial
and Industrial
Development

Public and
Institutional
Development

Urban Growth
Area &
Annexation

Public
Participation

Sustainable
Land Use

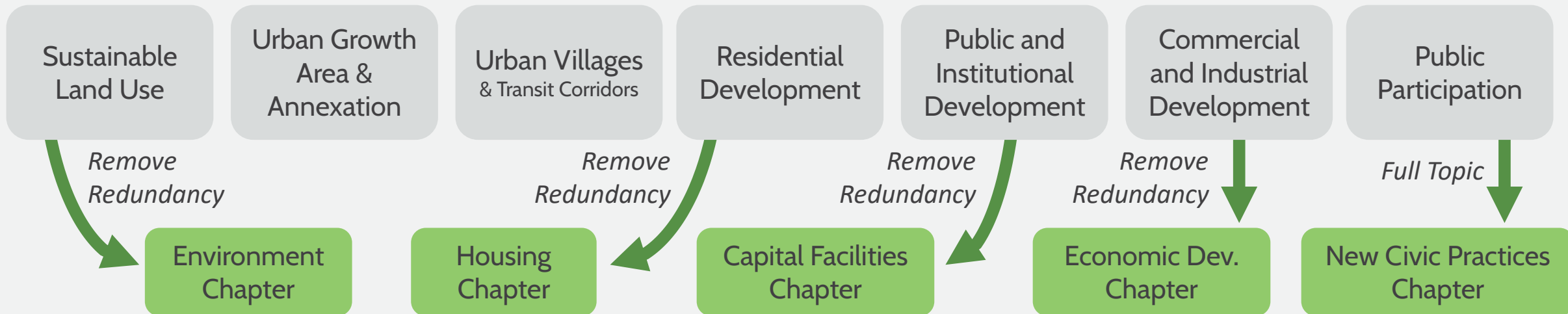
**Note: The future land use map is also
located in this chapter**



Shifts out of Land Use Chapter

Some concepts have been moved to other chapters in the proposed updates.

Note: The current topics have been rearranged here to better align with the proposed topic order.

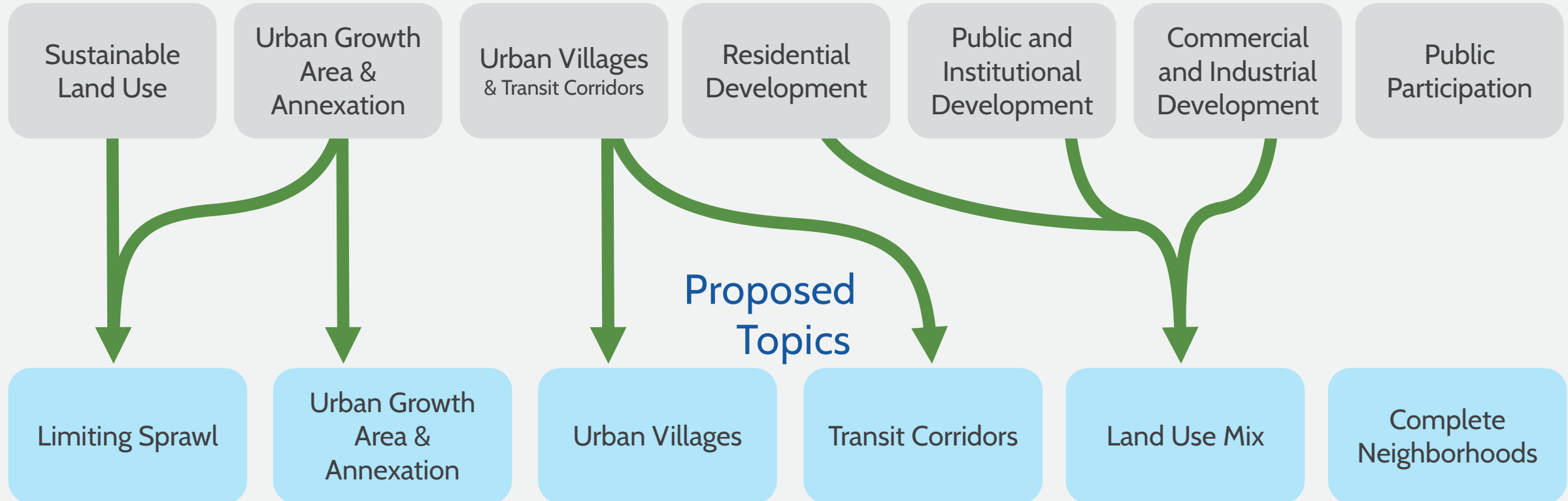




Shifts within the Land Use Chapter

Other concepts have been shifted or split between each of the proposed topics.

2016 Plan Topics





Limiting Sprawl

Urban Growth Area & Annexation

Urban Villages

Transit Corridors

Land Use Mix

Complete Neighborhoods



Land area to meet targets

Updated targets

Growth strategy: Urban Villages and transit corridors between them

Cluster near facilities/ amenities (efficient use of resources, preserve nature)

Clustering development near parks, schools, and other amenities; encouraging assembly of parcels

Watershed protection

Preservation of land outside UGAs through land preservation and discouraging rural development

*Including open space corridor between Ferndale and Bellingham
Note: UGAs (Urban Growth Areas) are the areas that the city could grow into.*

Existing

Update

New



Limiting Sprawl

Urban Growth Area & Annexation

Urban Villages

Transit Corridors

Land Use Mix

Complete Neighborhoods



Annexation Plan

Including (1) identifying land use designations & (2) analyzing opportunities, costs, and priorities

Requiring new UGA or UGA reserve areas to provide uses fulfilling a need

Areas must be able to provide urban levels of development

Collaborating in UGA decisions

Whatcom County, applicable utility and school districts

Financial sustainability

Only allow annexations when annexation plan analysis is completed and sustainable

Habitat protection

Avoiding expansion into high priority habitats when possible

Existing

Update

New



Limiting Sprawl

Urban Growth Area & Annexation

Urban Villages

Transit Corridors

Land Use Mix

Complete Neighborhoods



Mixed-use, pedestrian-oriented, and vibrant

Each unique urban village planned individually

Incentivizing and monitoring development in urban villages

Incentivizing affordable housing, public open space, and other public benefits

Multiple property planning

Collaborating with property owners

City Center as core center

Reviewing community needs for future urban villages

Filling community gaps in access

Existing

Update

New



Limiting Sprawl

Urban Growth Area & Annexation

Urban Villages

Transit Corridors

Land Use Mix

Complete Neighborhoods



Renewed emphasis, new diagram

Identify transit corridors connecting Urban Villages and important destinations

Clustering commercial uses and focusing pedestrian improvements in these areas

Identify transit-oriented development (TOD) opportunities

*Planning with all, not just one, of the following:
Frequent transit, adequate development density, enhanced pedestrian environment, and appropriate parking*

Coordinated land use-transportation planning along these corridors

In collaboration with WTA

Investing in set frequent transit routes; coordinating other, more fluid transit with land use

More compact, pedestrian-oriented mixed-use nodes

Avoiding auto-oriented strip development and encouraging its redevelopment

Existing

Update

New



Limiting Sprawl

Urban Growth Area & Annexation

Urban Villages

Transit Corridors

Land Use Mix

Complete Neighborhoods



Monitoring and updating land supply in alignment with economy and needs

Citywide approaches

Definitions of each land use designation

Reserving and separating industrial land

Support for human services and service-enriched housing spread across the city

Planning near the airport

Especially during rezones

Consistent approaches to manage regulations and processes

Shifting all existing definitions here

Adjusting residential definitions to reflect a gradient between “house-scale” residential and high density residential; allowing small-scale commercial throughout this gradient



Allowing transitional housing, permanent supportive housing, emergency housing, and emergency shelters more broadly across the city;



Encouraging an equitable distribution across the city

Separating incompatible uses

- Existing
- Update
- New



STEP Housing and Human Services

- Incentivizing affordable housing, public open space, and other public benefits in Urban Villages
- Allowing transitional, supportive, and emergency housing with consistent occupants through a low barrier process
- Allowing emergency shelters and emergency housing with inconsistent occupants in all zones in similar scale to residential development
- Encouraging human service uses, especially near transit, jobs, education, and services





Limiting Sprawl

Urban Growth Area & Annexation

Urban Villages

Transit Corridors

Land Use Mix

Complete Neighborhoods



Limiting barriers to introducing uses that are missing and needed in some areas but present in other similar areas

Encouraging uses facing public spaces that activate them and make them more vibrant and enjoyable

This policy exists already to help build community, foster small businesses, and reduce reliance on cars, but the "Land Use Mix" goal will more clearly define where these uses will be allowed outright.

Aligned with community interest to limit individual use size, number of commercial uses in an area, hours of operation, and impacts like noise

Applies to both residential and commercial uses, aligned with community input

For allowing alternative or new building practices

Evaluating opportunities for nonconforming uses that provide community value

Encouraging public amenities in large private projects

Activation of public spaces

Small-scale commercial uses promotion

Regulate size, density, and operation of small commercial uses in residential areas

Flexibility in size and uses along arterials and near Urban Villages and amenities

Participating in state code

Nonconforming flexibility

Existing

Update

New



Limiting Sprawl

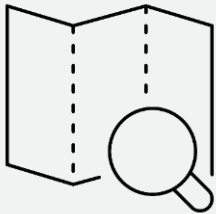
Urban Growth Area & Annexation

Urban Villages

Transit Corridors

Land Use Mix

Complete Neighborhoods



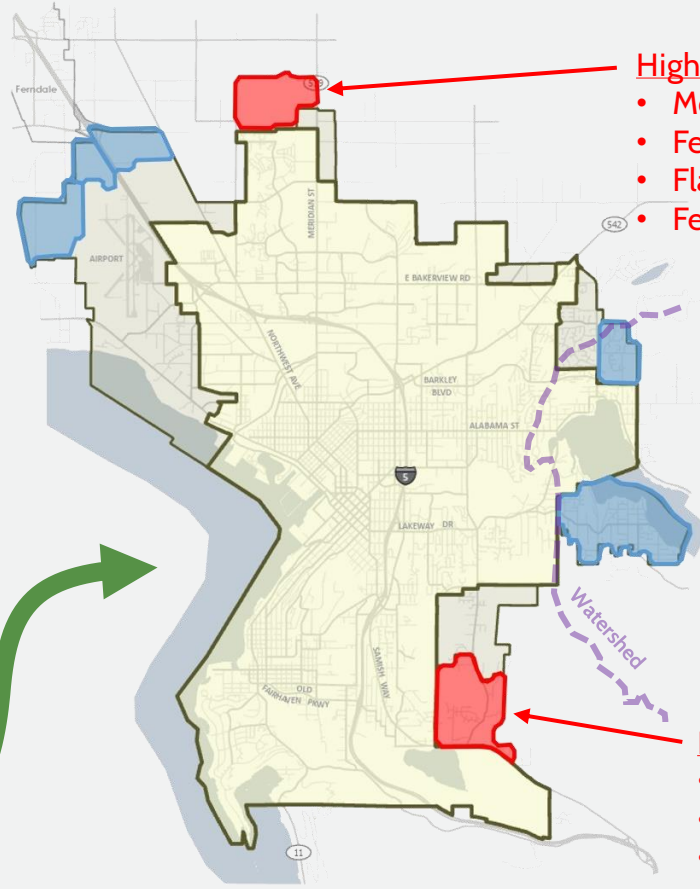
The future land use map also lives in this chapter

This map guides zoning across the city. The below outlines the major updates anticipated for it.

Reflect growth strategy updates outlined in previous slides

Consolidation of Residential Single and Multi areas into new residential range

Changes to the UGA (Urban Growth Area)



- Higher Priority**
- More housing capacity sooner
 - Fewer infrastructure needs
 - Flat Terrain
 - Fewer environmental constraints

- Current city boundary
- UGA (to remain)
- Reserve areas to consider adding to UGA
- UGA to consider shifting to reserve area

- Lower Priority**
- Less housing capacity
 - More infrastructure needs
 - Steep terrain
 - More environmental constraints

This map shows updates under consideration for the UGA (the area into which the city can grow) and the UGA Reserve (the next round of areas for evaluation to become part of the UGA).

Existing

Update

New



The slides that follow are available online for public viewing and comment. Additional slides for Planning Commission discussion are interspersed.





What the Community Said

These descriptions summarize the most common opinions we heard relevant to this chapter.

Every neighborhood needs to do its part to provide housing choices for everyone.

We need more affordable housing, especially in mixed-income buildings.

We need more 2-bedroom units and options for families. They should be located near jobs and amenities, even if they are small.

Providing housing closer to jobs, transit, bicycle routes, and pedestrian paths is critical to tackle climate change.

Co-living and communal housing types are interesting, especially for seniors and students.

Excited about more housing types in every neighborhood, but fiveplexes, sixplexes, and stacked flats should only be allowed on busier streets.

Existing housing density allowances seem inequitable or inconsistent. Aligning density with amenity access is preferred.



2016 Housing Chapter Topics

The 2016 Comprehensive Plan Housing Chapter is organized around these 5 topics. Each one is written as a goal in the plan.

Note: The current topics have been rearranged here to better align with the proposed 2025 Plan topic order.

Quantity and Type of
Housing

Housing for All
Incomes

Sense of Place

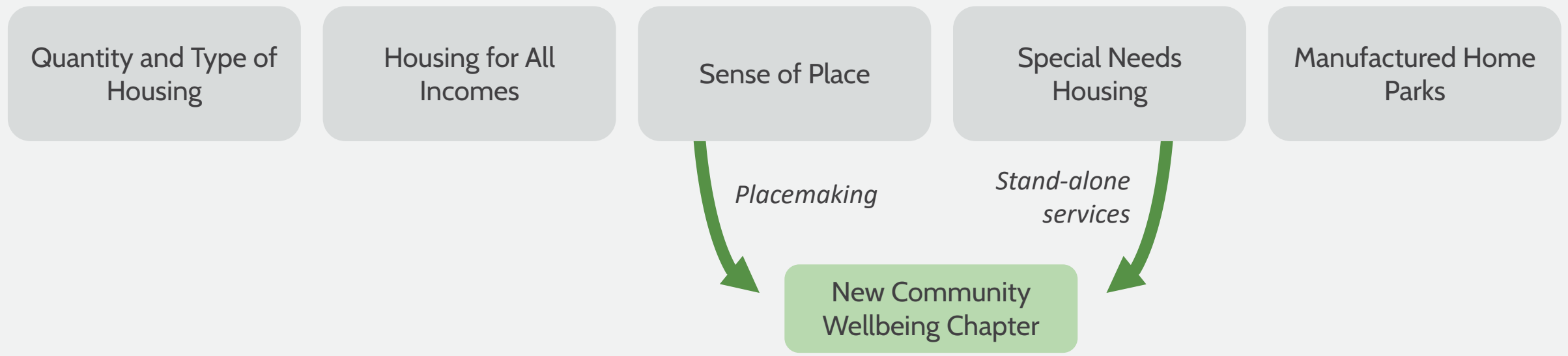
Special Needs
Housing

Manufactured Home
Parks



Shifts out of Housing Chapter

Some concepts have been moved to other chapters in the proposed updates.

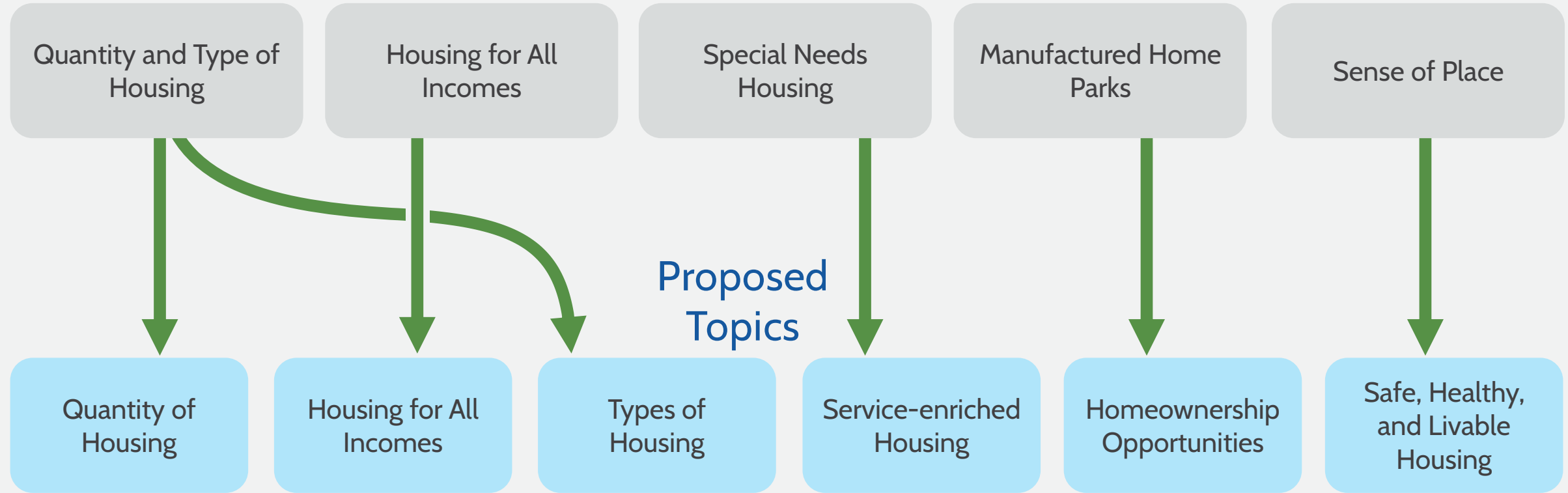




Shifts within Housing Chapter

Other concepts have been shifted or split between each of the proposed topics.

2016 Plan Topics





Quantity of Housing

Housing for All Incomes

Types of Housing

Service-enriched Housing

Homeownership Opportunities

Safe, Healthy, and Livable Housing



Reduction of cost, timeline, and process where possible



*HB 1220 (2022) – Reduction of barriers to housing production
SB 5290 (2023) – Streamlining permit processes*

Preservation and availability of housing

Including tracking prevalence of empty investment or vacation homes.

Reduce barriers to viable construction types



*SB 5491 (2023) – 6-story single-stair buildings
HB 2071 (2024) – 3-6 unit buildings; small unit types
Also mass timber construction*

Smart and infill development



*HB 1110 (2023)
Expansion of Infill Toolkit citywide (see Land Use chapter)*

Additional flexibility for large housing projects

When aligned with the City’s growth strategy

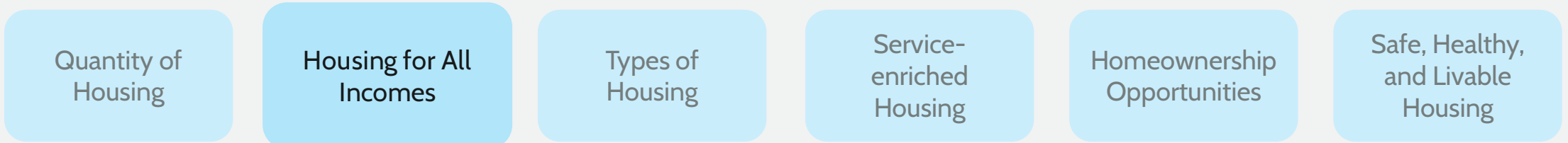
Flexibility of ground level uses

Making it easier to develop housing in mixed-use areas

Existing

Update

New



The Consolidated Plan identifies specific actions and priorities regarding affordable housing.

Affordable housing in all neighborhoods



*HB 1220 (2022)
Growth distributed by income band*

Anti-displacement approaches



*HB 1220 (2022)
Identification of areas at risk of their residents being displaced by economic pressures, strategies to address this including protection of naturally occurring affordable housing*

Mixed-income projects and incentives

Strengthening existing programs and continuing monitoring economic feasibility of adjustments or new programs

Reduction of barriers to developing affordable housing

Including equitable distribution

Filling the housing continuum

Modular construction, small lots, co-living housing, tiny house villages, etc

Local, regional, and federal collaboration & funding

Including local consideration of affordable housing in other public projects

Affordability in public projects

Considering the viability of affordable housing with other public projects

Messaging and partnerships

Existing

Update

New

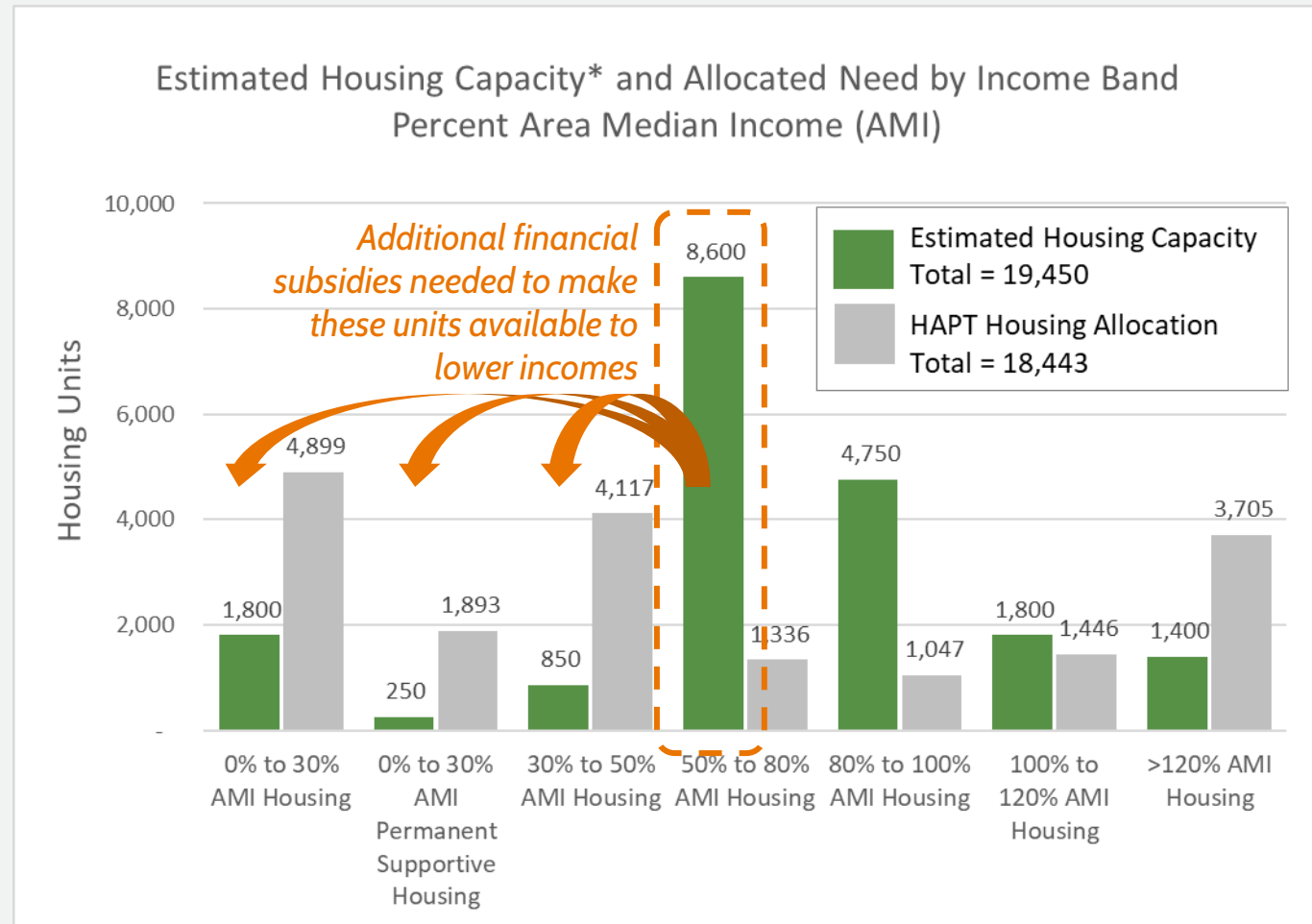


HB 1220: Estimated Housing by Income

Green bars on this chart are estimated housing capacity by affordability to area median income (AMI).

Grey bars are the allocated housing need based on requirements of House Bill 1220

HAPT is WA Department of Commerce [Housing for All Planning Tool](#)



* Includes anticipated capacity from HB 1110 (middle housing), some transit-oriented development, some co-living in residential multi units, and inclusion of North UGA Reserve Area.



Quantity of Housing

Housing for All Incomes

Types of Housing

Service-enriched Housing

Homeownership Opportunities

Safe, Healthy, and Livable Housing



Regulations for the full housing continuum

Beyond “single family” and “multifamily”

Variety of types within all areas of the city



HB 1110 (2023), HB 1998 (2024) – Allowing small lot, ADUs, cottages, multiplexes, common courtyards, townhomes, and co-living housing everywhere except Lake Whatcom Watershed

Encouraging 2+ BR Units and options for families with children

Ensuring a future supply of larger units; See the [Housing Preference Survey data](#)

Variety of options for seniors and those with disabilities

Such as Universal Design

Support for housing for unique needs

Especially for seniors and those with disabilities

Off-campus student housing options

Existing

Update

New



Housing Continuum

THE HOUSING CONTINUUM

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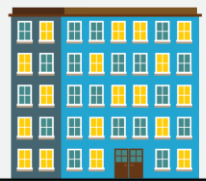
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MULTIUNIT BUILDINGS

SINGLE UNIT (ATTACHED OR DETACHED) BUILDINGS



Co-living Housing (large)

Apartments

Co-living Housing (small)

Fourplex-Sixplex

Triplex/Stacked Flats

Courtyard Apartments

Cottage Housing

ADU

Duplex

Townhomes

Single Family (small)

Single Family (large)

UNITS PER BUILDING

UNIT SIZE

Note: Many other factors also impact housing cost. This graphic generalizes how housing types and densities impact housing cost along a continuum.



Quantity of Housing

Housing for All Incomes

Types of Housing

Service-enriched Housing

Homeownership Opportunities

Safe, Healthy, and Livable Housing



*HB 1220 (2022)
Permanent Supportive Housing & others*



Ensuring service-enriched housing investments are well coordinated and scaled with availability of appropriate services

Clearer definition of shelter, transitional, and permanent housing types

Especially regarding homelessness

Housing with on-site services

Ensuring services scale with housing to meet needs

Shelter, transitional, and permanent supportive housing options

Equitable distribution of projects

Regional collaboration

Community education

Note: Stand-alone services have been shifted to new Community Wellbeing chapter

Existing

Update

New



Supporting the Full Continuum

Unsheltered



Permanent Housing



Image: Press Democrat

Tent Encampments
(Regulated)

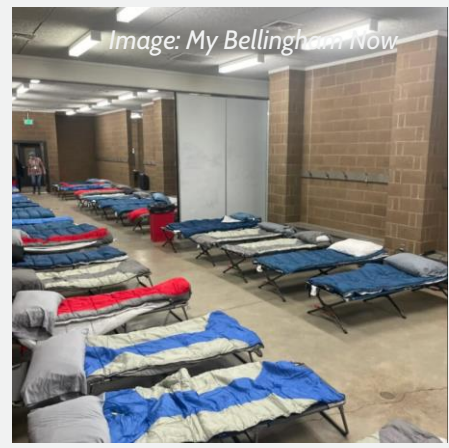


Image: My Bellingham Now

Severe Weather Shelter



Tiny House Villages

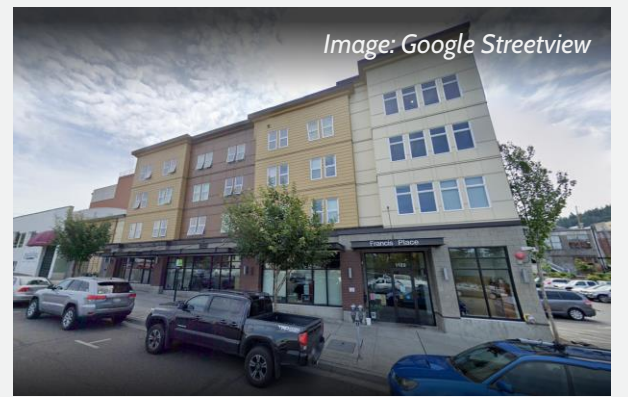


Image: Google Streetview

Permanent Supportive Housing



Image: MRSC

Safe Parking



Image: Cascadia Daily News

Emergency Shelter



Image: Google Streetview

Transitional Housing



Quantity of Housing

Housing for All Incomes

Types of Housing

Service-enriched Housing

Homeownership Opportunities

Safe, Healthy, and Livable Housing



*Encourage these types in more places – HB 1110 (2023)
Allow lot splitting for them, and explore cost-saving opportunities*



This allows owners to pay less overall because they are sharing some of the property, whether that be land (condos), public space (co-ops/co-housing), or both of the above (co-living housing)

This limits how much the owner owns, such as in a land trust (where a non-profit owns the land, but the resident owns the building)

*Support for rental communities transitioning to ownership models
Education and support for programs assisting homeowners to keep their homes*

*Expanding tenant opportunity to purchase – SB 5198 (2023)
Supporting displaced manufactured home park residents - HB 1771 (2023)*



Small-scale housing (small lot, cottage, townhome, etc)

Supporting shared equity options

Support for statewide condo-ization reform

Supporting limited equity options

Anti-displacement approaches

Protection of manufactured home parks

Existing

Update

New



Quantity of Housing

Housing for All Incomes

Types of Housing

Service-enriched Housing

Homeownership Opportunities

Safe, Healthy, and Livable Housing



Fair housing support

Ensuring safe and livable housing standards

Ensuring access to open space

Evaluating livability code elements

Clustering of housing to provide access to natural resources

This relates to rental registration and its inspection process

Both existing code and other considerations (usable space, design features, etc)


Existing

Update

New

Note: Access to community amenities is covered in the Land Use chapter.

Preparing for Next Discussion

 **Planning Commission** **2/20/2025 6:00 PM**
Meeting
Agenda Item

Subject:
The Bellingham Plan: Land Use & Housing Overview

Summary:
Staff will present an overview of the draft Land Use and Housing goals and policies for discussion. The Planning Commission is invited to discuss the issues at play and provide staff with any questions related to these chapters or additional analysis or data that is needed. An additional opportunity to discuss these two chapters in more detail will take place on March 20.

Previous Action:
Previous Planning Commission meetings on the Bellingham Plan:
4/20/2023, 6/22/2023, 3/07/2024, 5/16/2024, 6/20/2024, 8/1/2024, 9/5/2024, 9/19/2024, 10/24/2024, 2/6/2025

Recommendation:
Information/Discussion

Attachments:

1. STAFF MEMO - FEBRUARY 20
2. ATTACHMENT 1 - LAND USE CHAPTER OVERVIEW
3. ATTACHMENT 2 - HOUSING CHAPTER OVERVIEW
4. ATTACHMENT 3 - COMMUNITY DESIGN CHAPTER OVERVIEW
5. DRAFT GOALS AND POLICIES

Activity: Work Session

	Clearances		Date
Category:	<i>Elizabeth Erickson</i>	Senior Planner	01/30/2025
NA	<i>Chris Bolee</i>	Long Range Division Manager	01/30/2025
Presenter:	<i>Blake Lyon</i>	Department Head	01/30/2025

Time Estimate:

Staff Contact:
Elizabeth Erickson

Check the 2/20 meeting materials for:

- A brief overview memo
- A one-page memo for the chapter
- A link to the summary slides for the chapter
- A spreadsheet with draft goals and policies for all three chapters (Community Design is third)



March 6: Community Design