

# THE BELLINGHAM PLAN



## Land Use & Housing

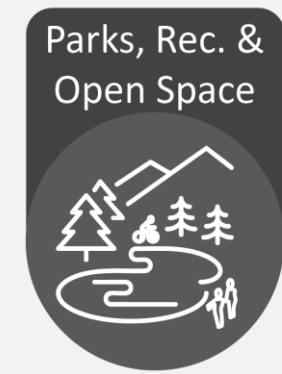
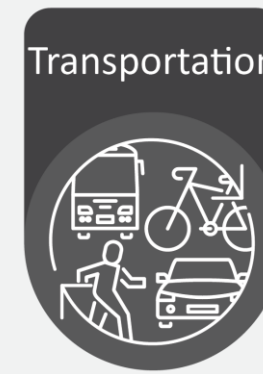
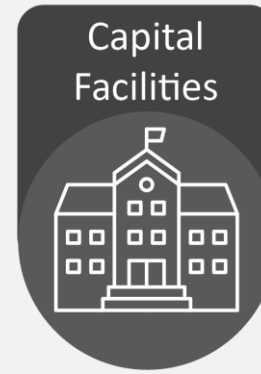
March 20, 2025

# Plan Chapters and Planning Commission Discussion

More Housing  
Choice: 2/20-3/20



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 showing a map with a magnifying glass over a building, symbolizing land use planning.

Housing

An icon showing a row of houses, symbolizing housing.

Community Design

An icon showing a multi-story building, symbolizing community design.

Capital Facilities

An icon showing a school building, symbolizing capital facilities.

Transportation

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

Parks, Rec. & Open Space

An icon showing a park with trees and a path, symbolizing parks, recreation, and open space.


Climate

An icon showing a house with solar panels and a wind turbine, symbolizing climate.

Environment

An icon showing a globe with a tree, symbolizing environment.

Civic Practices

An icon showing a house with people, symbolizing civic practices.

Community Wellbeing

An icon showing hands holding people, symbolizing community wellbeing.

Economic Development

An icon showing a hand holding a dollar sign, symbolizing economic development.

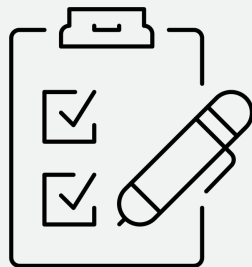
# Goals for Today



**Become familiar with** *the land use chapter and map proposals.*



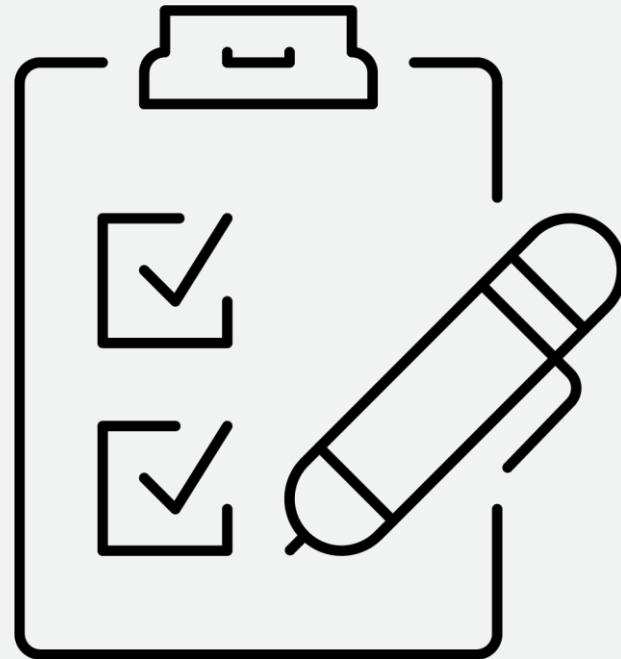
**Discuss** *related topic areas with most significant changes.*



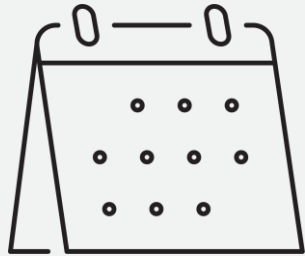
**Identify** *any additional questions or information needed.*

# Agenda

- Public Comment Summary
- Annexation and UGA Planning
- Citywide Planning
- Small-scale Commercial Uses
- Transit Corridors
- Land Use Map



# Future Opportunities for Discussion



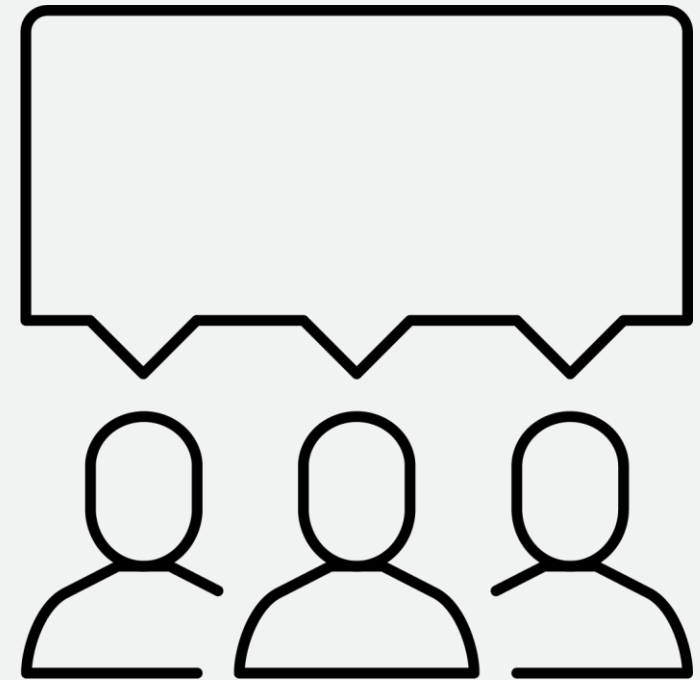
Summer Planning Commission meetings to discuss EIS and especially the Land Use Map in more detail



Summer public hearing and recommendation to City Council

# February 20 Discussion

- Outlines of Land Use & Housing Chapters
- Detailed Discussions
  - **Land Uses: Residential, Human Services**
    - \* Ensuring edible gardens/plants are addressed in food access
  - **More Housing Types**
    - \* Clarifying tracking of empty homes
    - \* Ensuring STRs have enough flexibility
    - \* Clarifying medium-sized unit (2-3 bedroom) language
    - \* Adding the conversion of properties to residential uses
  - **Planning for All Incomes**
    - \* Clarifying Affordable vs affordable housing
    - \* Inserting language about “starter homes” or similar
  - **Emergency Housing**





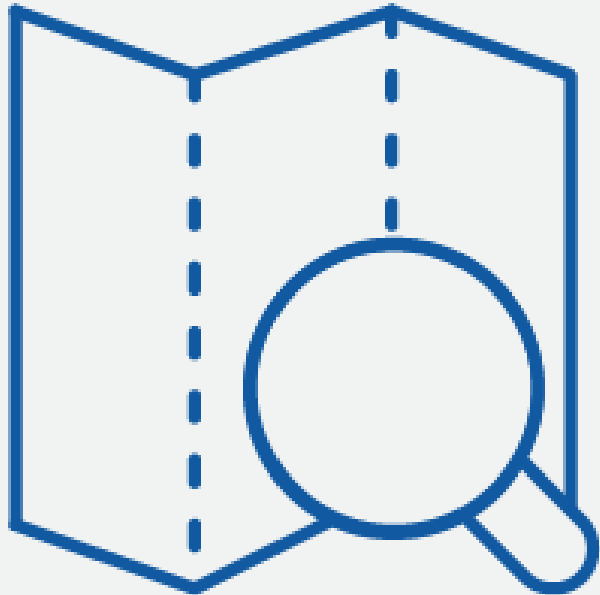
# Public Comment Summary: Housing



- Broad support for proposed multi-pronged housing approach
- Emphasis of need for mid-sized ownership opportunities, especially in less noisy areas
- Concerns about neighborhood character waning or about getting more blocky apartment buildings
- Concerns about housing being used primarily as an investment
- Interest in converting under-utilized properties to housing
- Desire for green spaces intermixed with housing as we grow



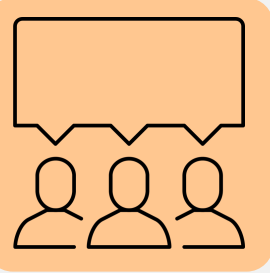
# Public Comment Summary: Land Use



- General support for changes, especially housing-related ones
- Questions about open space and community forest planning
- General support for UGA removals as shown and addition of North UGA Reserve
- Opposition to (and limited support for) adding South UGA Reserve to UGA
- Concerns about retiring of Neighborhood Plans
- Skepticism about economic viability of new small-scale commercial
- Interest in maintaining quality design alongside interest in limiting permit process complexity
- Importance of transit and bikes in achieving goals
- Desire for impacts to be equitable – no “exempt” areas

# Chapter Outline Guide

*This symbol means  
discussion will  
follow this slide*



Goal Concept



Existing Concept

*This concept exists in the 2016 Comprehensive Plan already.*

Some Updates

*Either this concept will be emphasized more than in the current plan, or something minor is being changed about it.*

New Concept/  
Major Updates

*This concept does not exist in the 2016 plan at all or will include significant changes.*



*This icon indicates this concept is related to state requirements or legislation.*

Policy  
Concepts  
within  
above  
Goal

**Note: Each policy concept bubble may represent one or more proposed policies**



**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

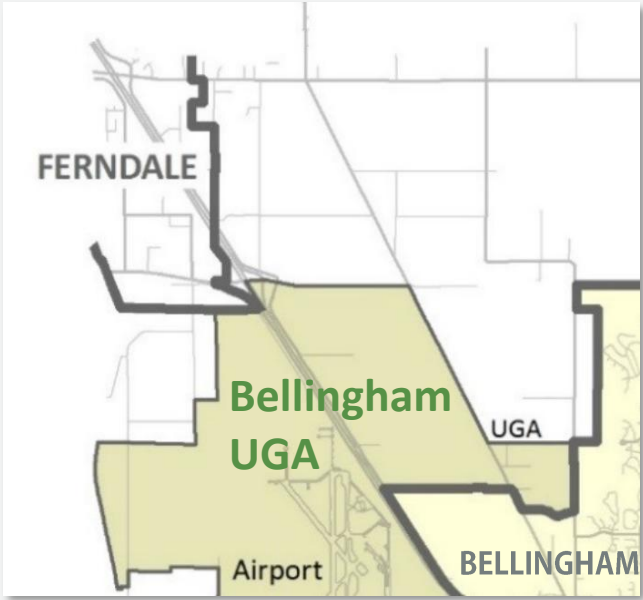
Cluster near facilities/amenities (efficient use of resources, preserve nature)

*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.*



Note: New draft policy about formal collaboration with Ferndale on UGA planning (countywide discussions)

Existing

Update

New



# Open Space Corridors

Existing Comp Plan (PRO Plan Chapter) includes a recommended open space map

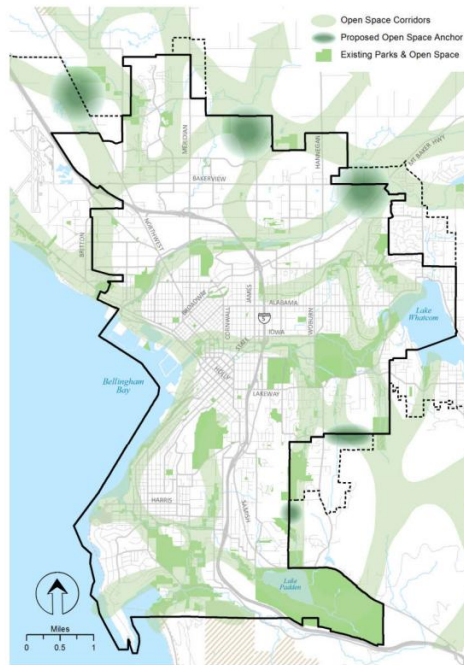
Staff are working with boards and commissions to develop an updated map

## General Open Space Guidelines:

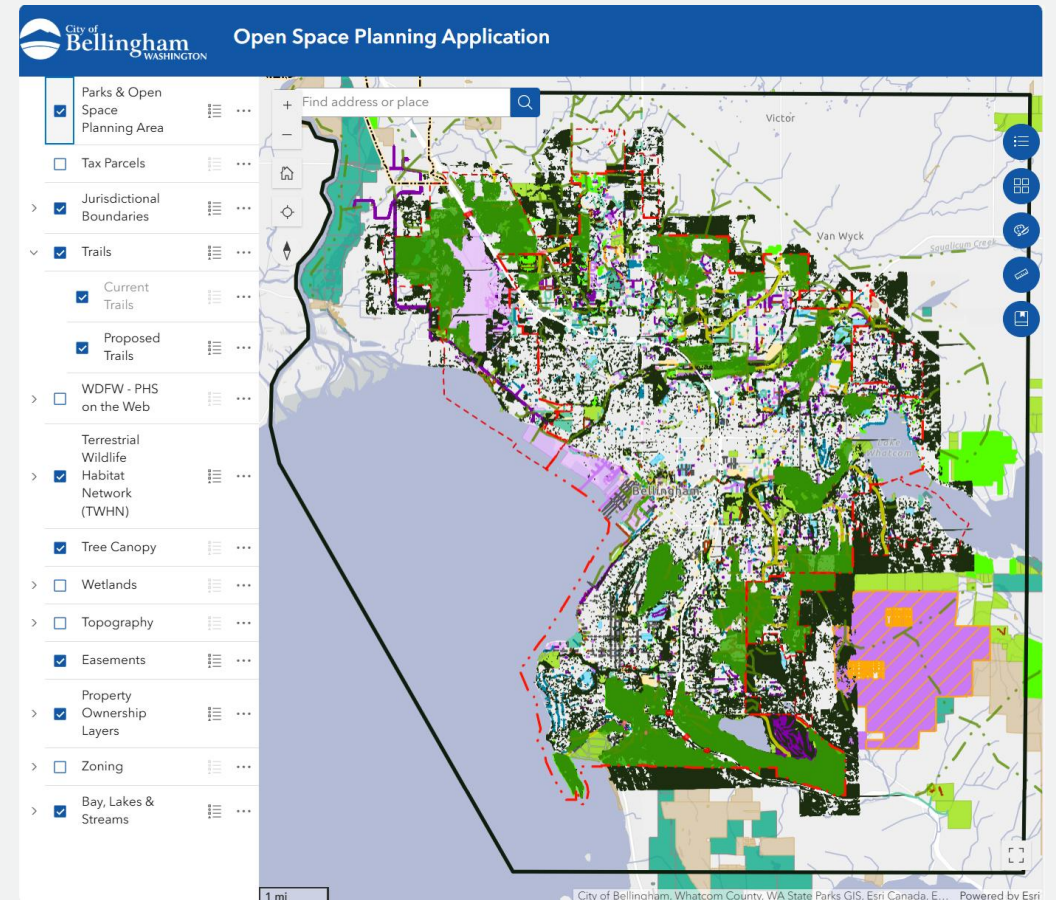
- Protection may occur through acquisition or easements, development rights and other similar non-fee simple arrangements;
- Provisions for public access and interpretive use should be included where appropriate;
- Conservation of wildlife migration corridors and critical habitats should be considered;
- Habitat restoration and invasive species removal should occur; and
- Tax incentives, density bonuses, transfer rights and other methods should be encouraged.

Bellingham Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan | 2020

### RECOMMENDED FACILITIES PLAN • OPEN SPACE



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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*

See next slide

**Collaborating in UGA decisions**

*Whatcom County, applicable utility and school districts*

**Financial sustainability** *Only allow annexations when annexation plan analysis is completed and sustainable*

See next slide

**Habitat protection**

*Avoiding expansion into high priority habitats when possible*

Existing

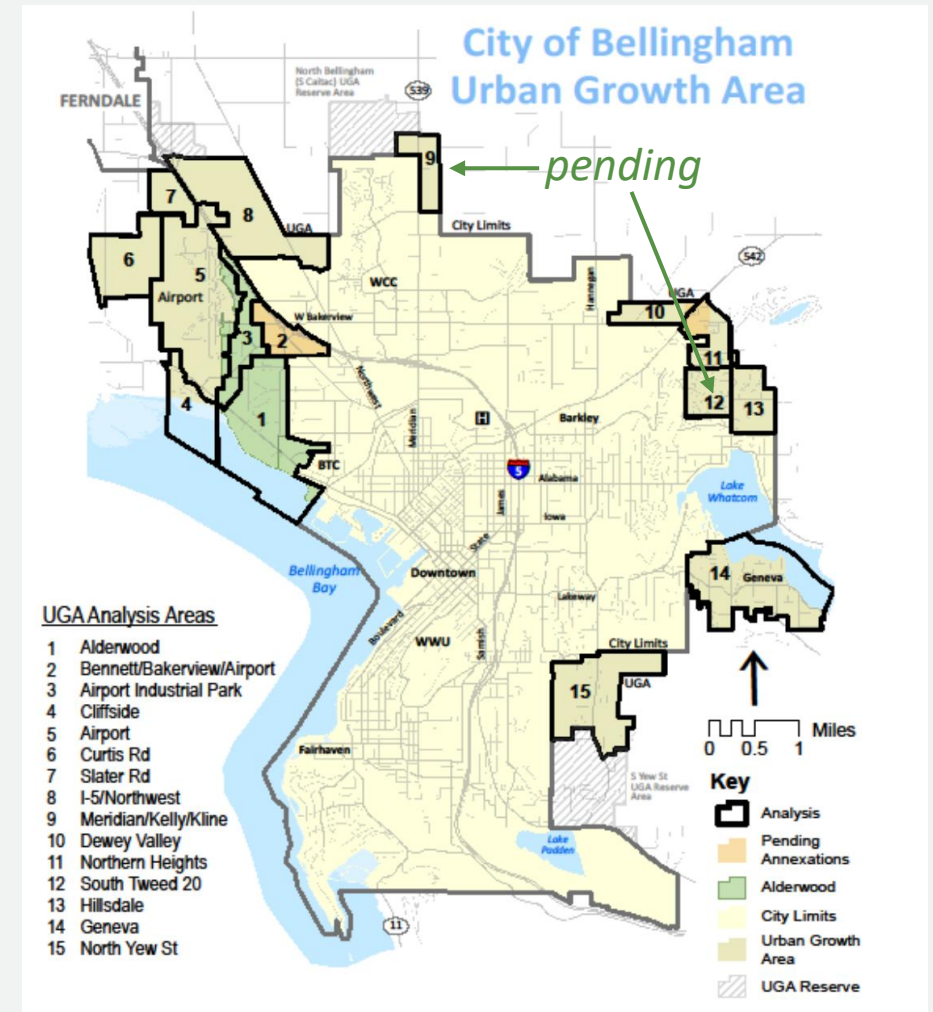
Update

New



# UGA and Annexation Planning

- New annexation plan
  - ID zoning for each UGA and UGA Reserve area
  - Analyze opportunities, costs, and priorities for each
- Additions to UGA/UGA Reserve: Urban levels of development, fulfilling identified need
- Only allow annexations
  - Once above is complete
  - With financially sustainable plan to provide services



2018 Annexation Strategy Map



Limiting Sprawl

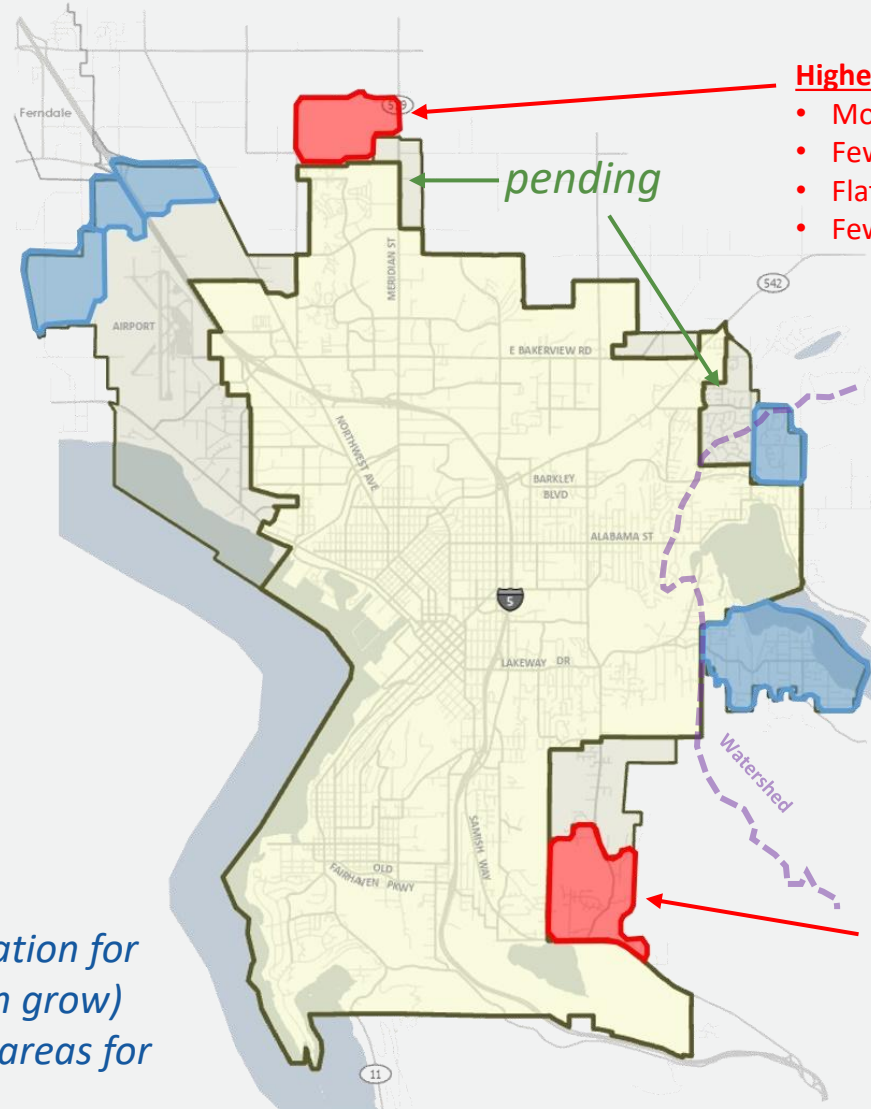
Urban Growth Area & Annexation

Urban Villages

Transit Corridors

Land Use Mix

Complete Neighborhoods



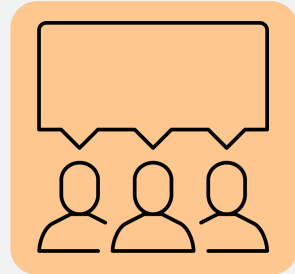
**Higher Priority**

- 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



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

See Next Slide  
Related to Transit Corridor Planning

Reviewing community needs for future urban villages

*Filling community gaps in access*

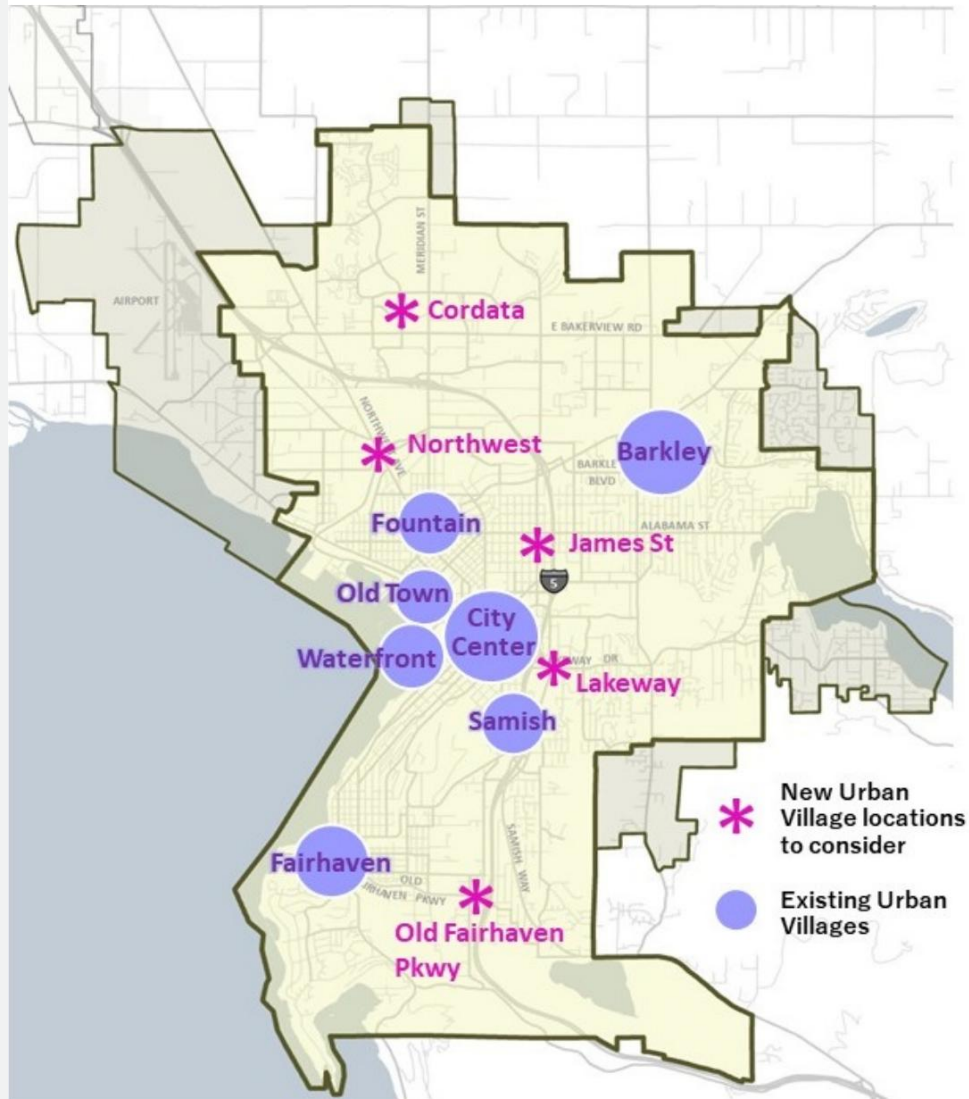
Existing

Update

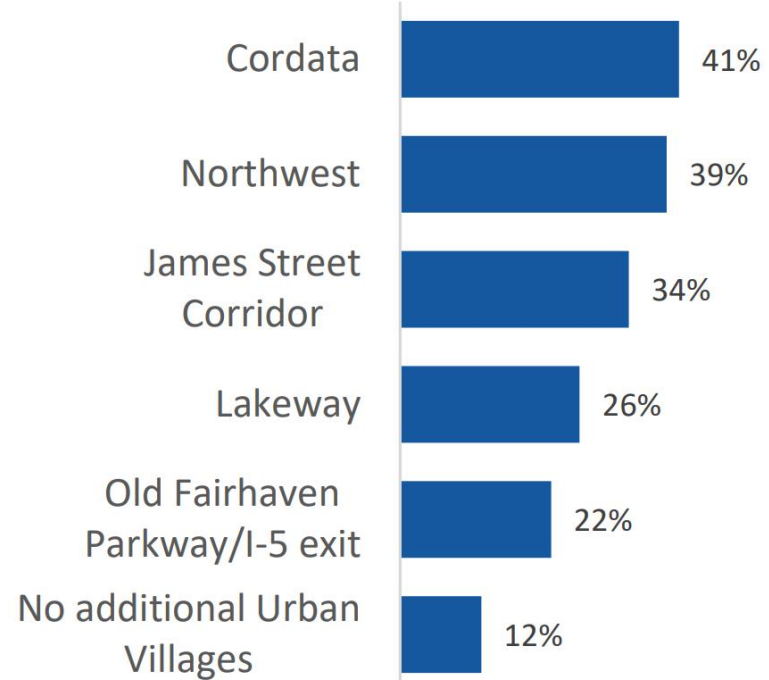
New



# Growth Survey (Summer 2024)



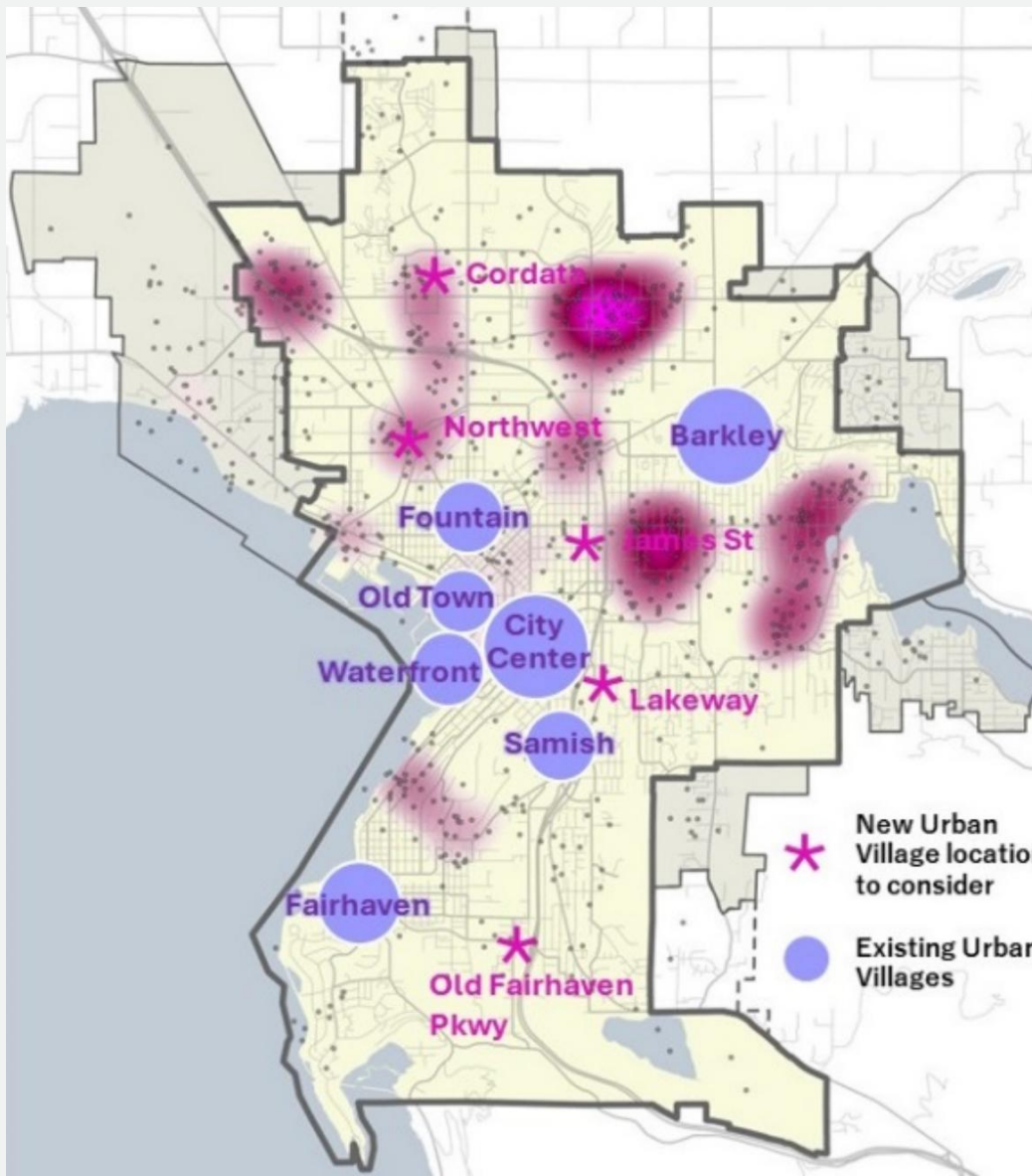
Where would you like to see a new Urban Village?





# Growth Survey (Summer 2024)

Other Areas  
of Interest





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

See next slide

*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

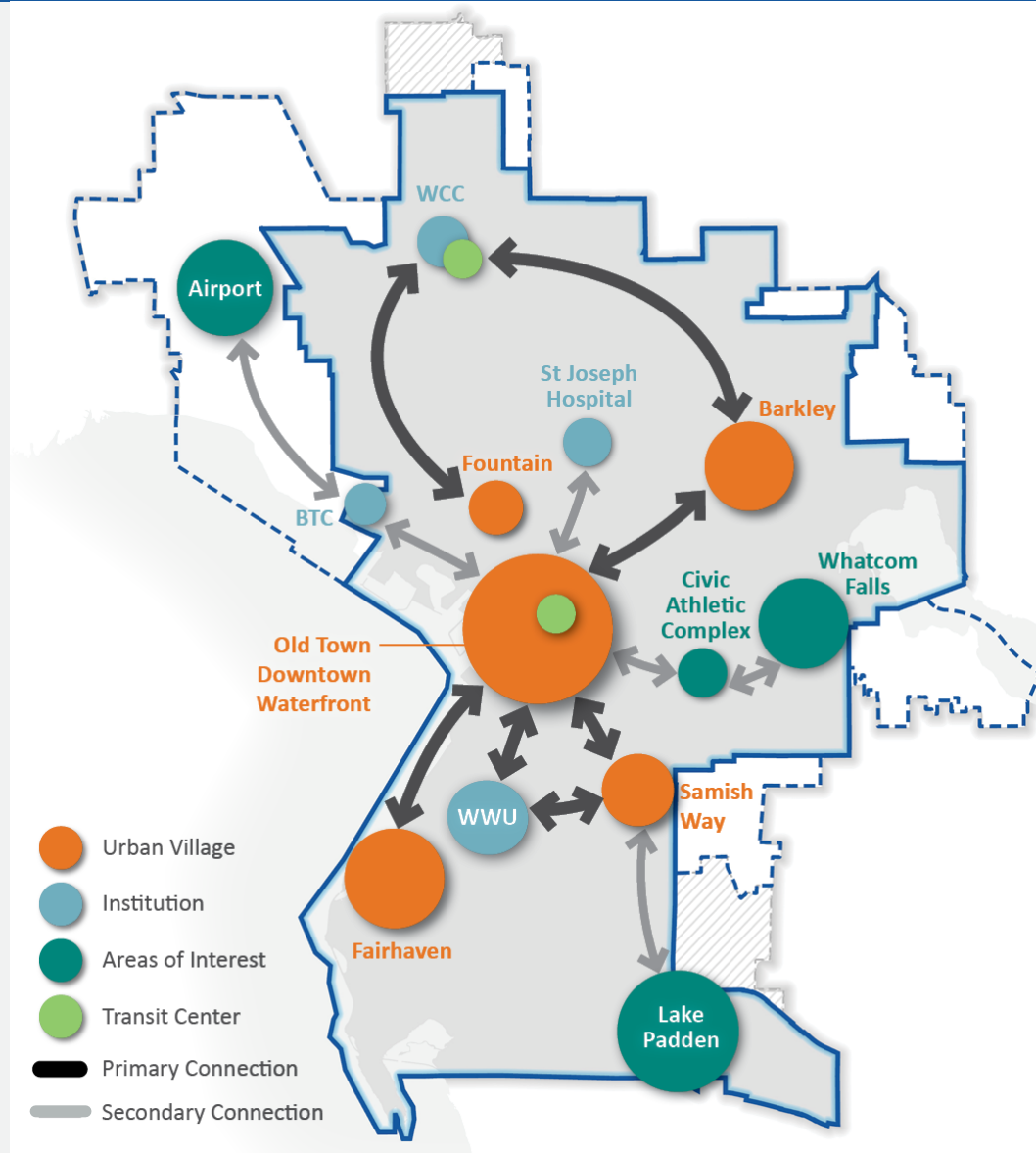
Existing

Update

New



# Transit Corridor Definition





Limiting Sprawl

Urban Growth Area & Annexation

Urban Villages

**Transit Corridors**

Land Use Mix

Complete Neighborhoods



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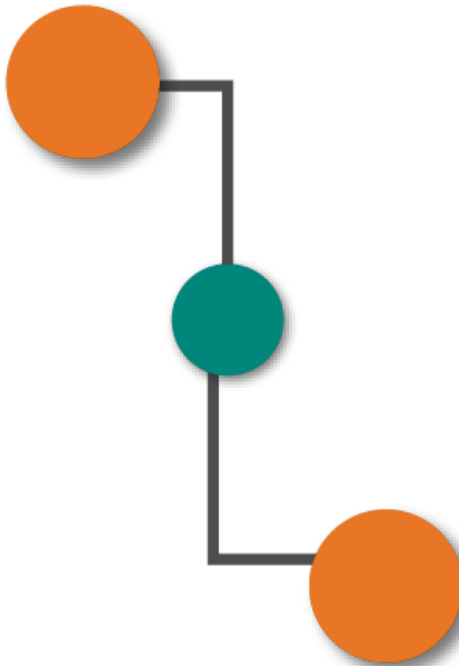
Existing

Update

New

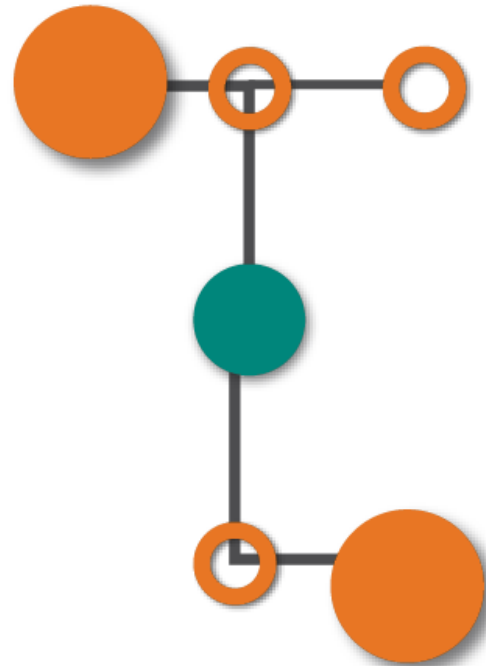


# Transit Corridor Planning



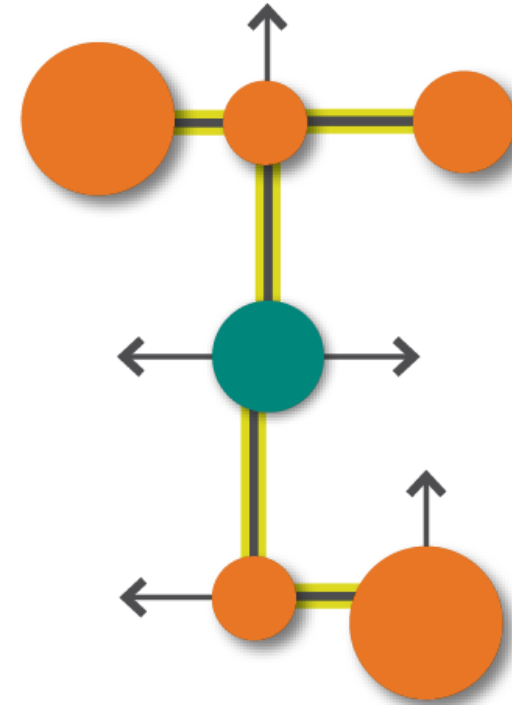
## Define Corridors

Linked by **transit**, connecting **urban villages** and when possible, **other destinations** (like Lakeway shopping Center, Birchwood Center or PeaceHealth).



## Adopt Regulations

Define **new mixed use centers** and utilize the Residential Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) designation.

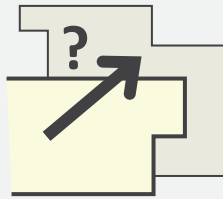
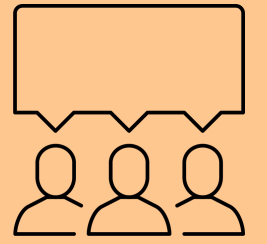


## Make Adjustments

Define other transit connections and invest in those **mixed use centers and urban villages** and in **pedestrian improvements** connecting them.



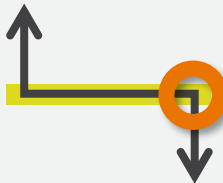
# Resulting Workplan Items



Annexation Plan (including pre-zoning)



New Urban Village Definition



Transit Corridor Planning



Limiting Sprawl

Urban Growth Area & Annexation

Urban Villages

Transit Corridors

**Land Use Mix**

Complete Neighborhoods



*Especially during rezones*

Monitoring and updating land supply in alignment with economy and needs

*Consistent approaches to manage regulations and processes*

Citywide approaches

See next slide

*Shifting all existing definitions here*

Definitions of each land use designation

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



Reserving and separating industrial land

*Allowing transitional housing, permanent supportive housing, emergency housing, and emergency shelters more broadly across the city; Encouraging an equitable distribution across the city*



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

Existing

Update

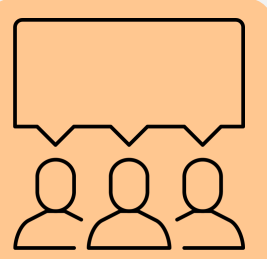
New

*Separating incompatible uses*

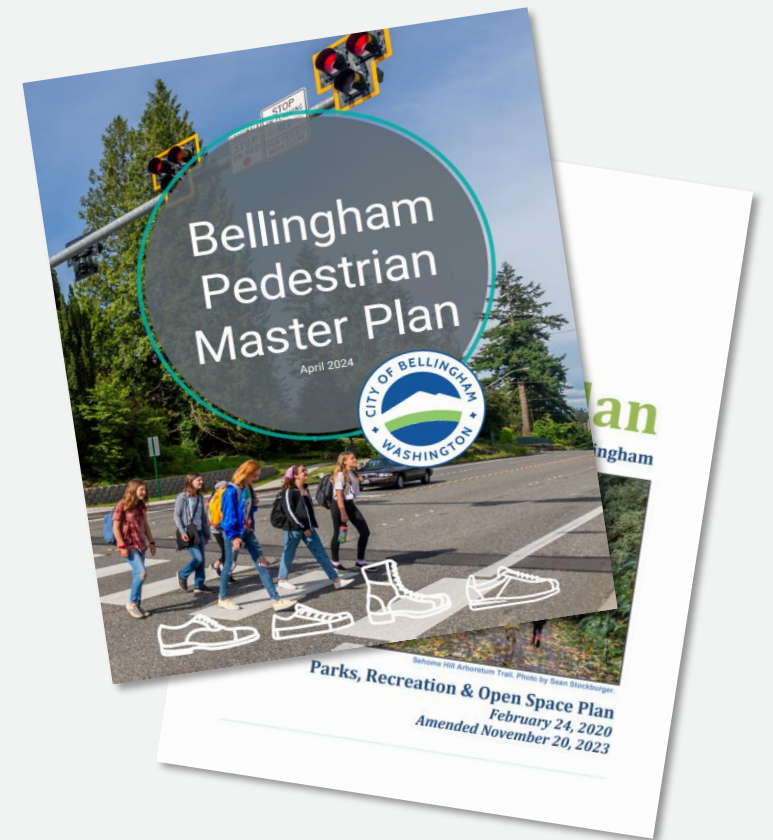
Planning near the airport



# Citywide Planning



- Highlighting continued shift towards equitable, citywide planning
- Examples
  - Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plans (past shift)
  - PROS Plan (past shift)
  - Concurrency Service Areas (current shift)
  - Neighborhood Plan Retirement (current shift)
  - Zoning Code Organization (future shift)
- Planned discussion at City Council on April 14





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 public amenities in large private projects

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

Activation of public spaces

*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*

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

*For allowing alternative or new building practices*

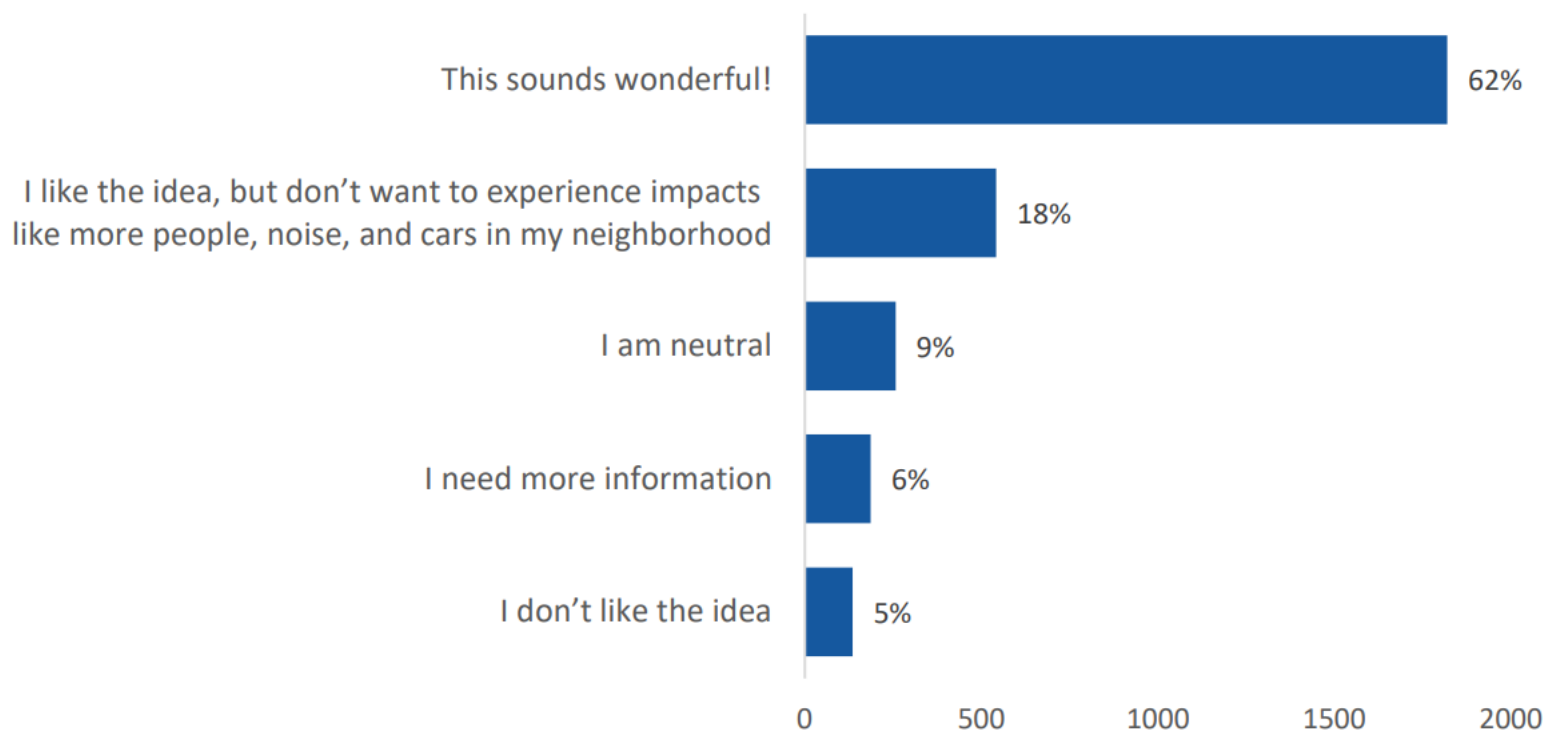
*Evaluating opportunities for nonconforming uses that provide community value*

See next slide



# Growth Survey (Summer 2024)

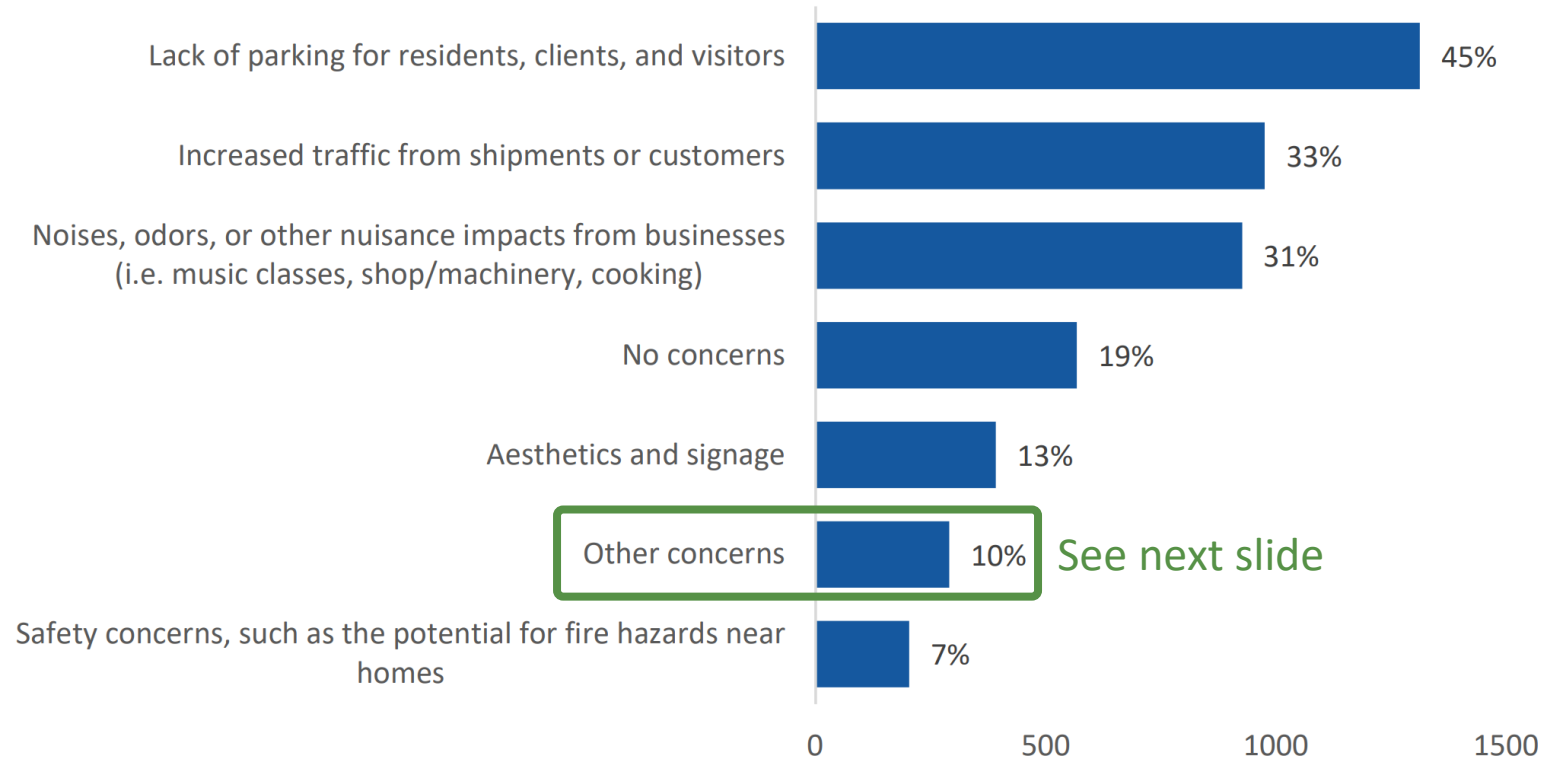
How open are you to having small-scale commercial amenities in your neighborhood, within walking distance, or allowed across Bellingham more generally?





# Growth Survey (Summer 2024)

What are your concerns about allowing for more commercial amenities in traditionally residential areas? (weighted)





# Growth Survey (October 2024)

## “Other” Response Categories

1. The importance of providing alternatives to driving to these commercial locations, with more transit, bike lanes, and sidewalks present in their vicinity.
2. Concerns that multiple spaces may redevelop and shift the nature of the neighborhood, especially if they attract crime to the area.
3. A worry that the new spaces may become chain stores or less useful businesses rather than local businesses providing a benefit to residents.



# Small-scale Commercial

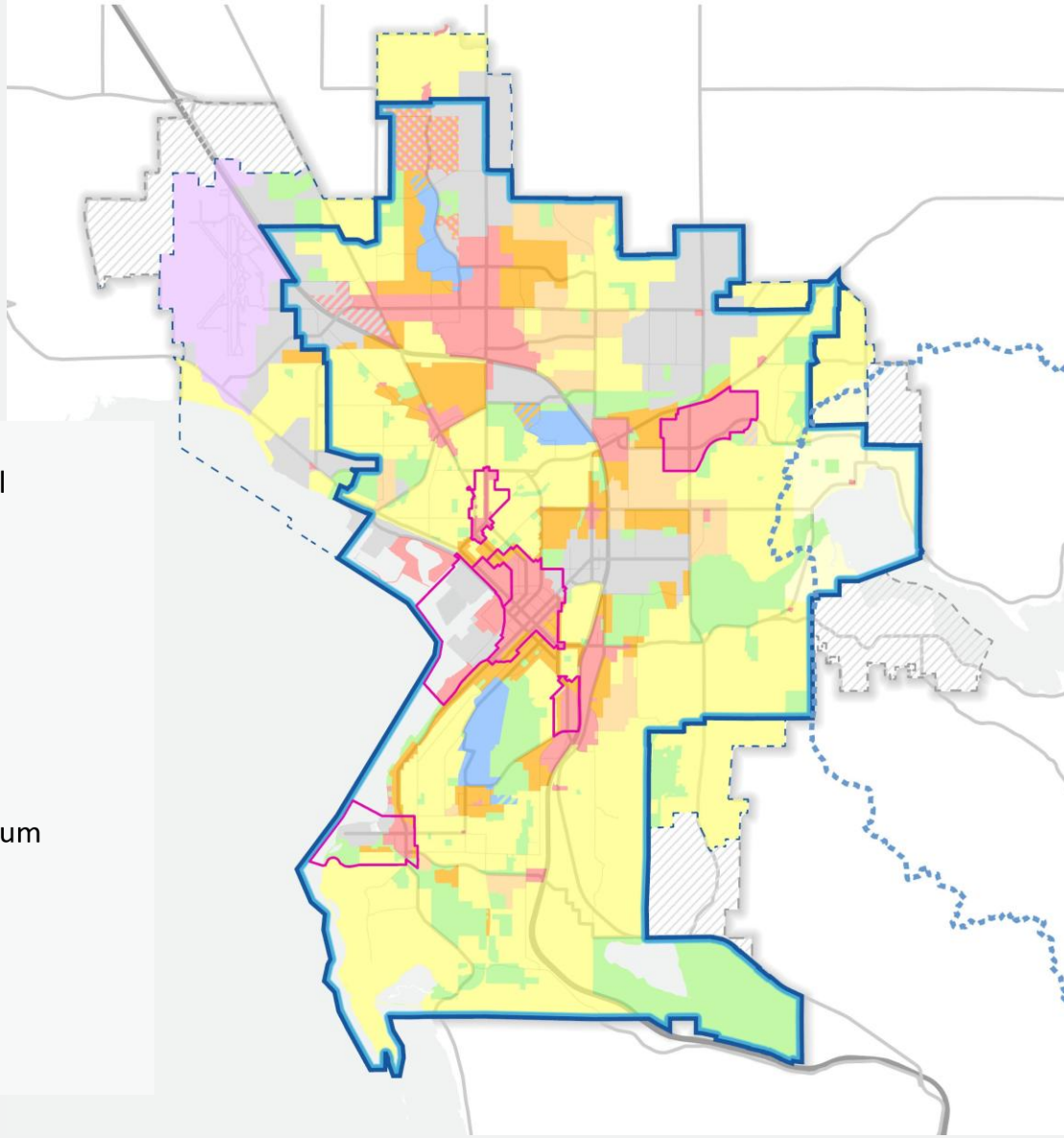


- Residential Designations allow “limited” small-scale commercial uses
- Complete Neighborhoods policy encourages of these uses
- Complete Neighborhoods policies provide management framework:
  1. Limited size of use and similar scale of building to residential allowances
  2. Consideration of impacts like noise, night-time activity, and parking
  3. More flexibility along arterials and near transit and urban villages

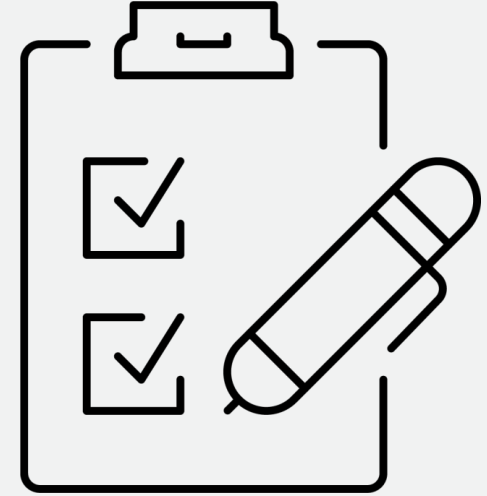
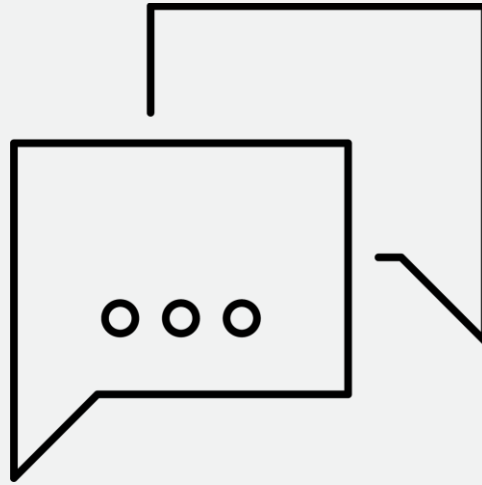
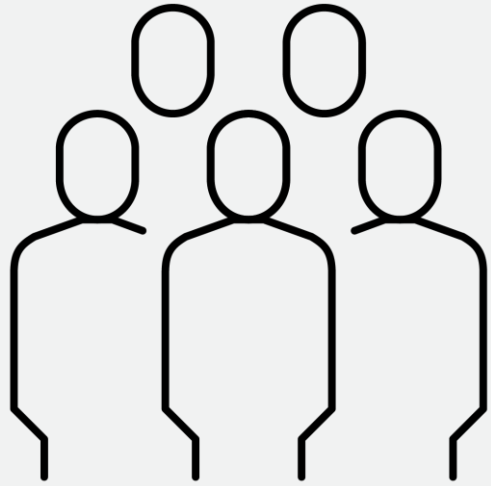




# Land Use Map



- Consolidation of residential zones
  - New Watershed zone
  - Residential L/M/H
- Addition of Barkley Urban Village
- Shifts of some publicly purchased land to Public designation
- Changes to UGA boundary



Other Questions/Comments?