



Mayor's Neighborhood Advisory Commission City of Bellingham

May 21, 2025
Hybrid Meeting

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m. by Mayor Lund.

Attendance

Neighborhood Representatives: Louise Bjornson (Birchwood Rep.); Greg Hope (Columbia Alt.); Diane Tudor (Cordata Alt.); Jake Charlton (Happy Valley Rep.); Alex McLean (Happy Valley Alt.); Bri O'Hare (Lettered Streets Rep.); Barbara June (Samish Alt.); Kerri Burnside (Silver Beach Rep.); Chris Roselli (WWU Co-Chair); Elan Engel (York Alt.); others

City Representatives: Mayor Kim Lund; Janice Keller, Deputy Administrator; Blake Lyon, Planning & Community Development Director; Chris Behee, Long Range Planning Manager

MINUTES

Review of April 2025 Meeting Minutes

- April's minutes were not ready for review at this time.

Opening Comments

- Mayor Lund introduced Blake Lyon, Planning & Community Development Director and Chris Behee, Long Range Planning Manager.
- Blake mentioned they are working on their periodic update to the Comprehensive Plan, which happens about once a decade, and addresses how the City manages its growth. He said there have been a lot of legislative changes at the state level in the past several years that set the framework for the update. Three of the most notable changes are to middle housing, process streamlining, and accessory dwelling units. There is not an opportunity to bring forward the neighborhood plans like they have historically done in the past; however, much of the information embedded in the neighborhood plans has informed several policies and programs within the Comprehensive Plan, and there are plenty of opportunities for public comment during this process.

Chris Behee, Long Range Planning Manager - Shifting from Neighborhood Plans to Citywide Planning Process

- Chris's full presentation during the May 5th Bellingham City Council Planning Committee is available here: [Planning Committee - 5/5/2025 9:00:00 AM - OnBase Agenda Online](#)
- Chris explained that the City is moving toward land-use policies that are more equitable than the neighborhood-by-neighborhood plans that we currently have, which will increase housing opportunities for all community members, supports infill development (which is better for our natural environment,) and uses public funds more efficiently and sustainably.
- Chris presented an illustration showing the complexity of the current land use system that the City operates in and how all infrastructure & program plans, institutional master plans, neighborhood & land use plans, and urban village plans make up the Comprehensive Plan. Outside of the Comprehensive Plan, the City also has the municipal code zoning regulations. He also said there are a wide variety of other plans the City uses that are not shown on the illustration, specifically in concert with other jurisdictions (like the County.) Chris explained that changing this complex system will

benefit everyone – both community members navigating the system, and City staff who review projects.

- Chris explained that we need more diverse housing, whereas neighborhood plans are often exclusionary, protecting single-family housing over other forms in the name of “preserving neighborhood character”, and are at odds with requirements of WA State House Bills 1220 & 1110.
- Mayor Lund added that two chapters will be new this year in the Bellingham Plan. The state has asked the City to bring forward a climate-focused chapter, and the City is also bringing forward a wellbeing and civic practices chapter.
- Chris said that the vision is to update the Bellingham Plan by the end of this year, which is the State deadline, and change the 25 zoning tables in the municipal code to a single standard zoning table, which is how most cities in Washington operate.
- Chris explained that the City has engaged in a lot of outreach for the plan and specifically targeted and had conversations with folks who traditionally they haven’t heard from during planning processes. Mayor Lund commented that the Planning team made great efforts to reach marginalized communities for public engagement, and when folks see the civic practices and wellbeing chapter of the plan, they’ll see the City’s commitment to continuing to do that into the future. Chris said that the Planning Department has a contract with Vamos to do outreach with the Hispanic community, they’ve worked with student representative groups at WWU, they’ve been in high school civics classes, and led special sessions at the senior center. All of these are not one-time efforts, but rather ongoing relationships that they’re building to keep them in the conversations going forward.
- Janice asked Chris to talk about the community work group that the Planning Department put together, which met eleven times throughout the last year. Chris explained that they received many applications, and the group was comprised of twelve people, more than 50% of renters, and included a variety of folks with different ages, genders, ethnicities, incomes, and backgrounds. They introduced them to the Bellingham Plan and before holding any open houses, they would run their presentations by the group to make sure they could understand the language and concepts, and had focused policy discussions with them. He said because of the interest of the group and the success they had, it’s a model they could see doing again in the future to continue to receive community feedback.
- There was some concern about neighborhoods losing their individual characteristics and being taken over by absentee landlords, and Chris explained that the neighborhoods are not going away, and there is a financial incentive for developers to keep existing housing on lots that can be made into multi-unit housing and/or ADUs.
- Mayor Lund commented that she spends a lot of time meeting about unauthorized encampments and the social tensions, public health crises and environmental degradation those create, and that is because we have created a scarcity of an essential good, which is housing. We are dealing with the impacts of that scarcity and paying those costs in our first responder, police and fire services.
- There was an extensive group discussion with questions and comments from many MNAC members and responses from Chris Behee, Mayor Lund, and Janice Keller.

Closing Comments:

The meeting adjourned at 8:32 p.m.

The next meeting is on June 18, 2025.