



PFD Education Series Part 1: City Center Overview

Downtown – Old Town – the Waterfront District

Presented by Tara Sundin
and Darby Galligan

June 18, 2026

Background

Jan '26 – PFD authorized debt refinancing

April '26 - Staff presented the Capital Maintenance Plan

April '26 - PFD Board voted to support Mayor's preferred investment strategy:

- Reserve 65% revenue for capital maintenance needs for
 - Mount Baker Theatre
 - Lightcatcher
 - + Old Fire Station #1
 - + Old City Hall
- Invest available funds in “enhancements” to the existing Regional Center

City consults with PFD Board to develop a set of recommendations for future “enhancements” to the existing regional center



Mount Baker Theatre – photo credit David Veatch

Background

Bellingham's Regional Center is defined as:

- Mount Baker Theatre
- Streetscapes
- Whatcom Museum
- One or more performing arts facilities
- Related parking facilities



Today's Session covers:

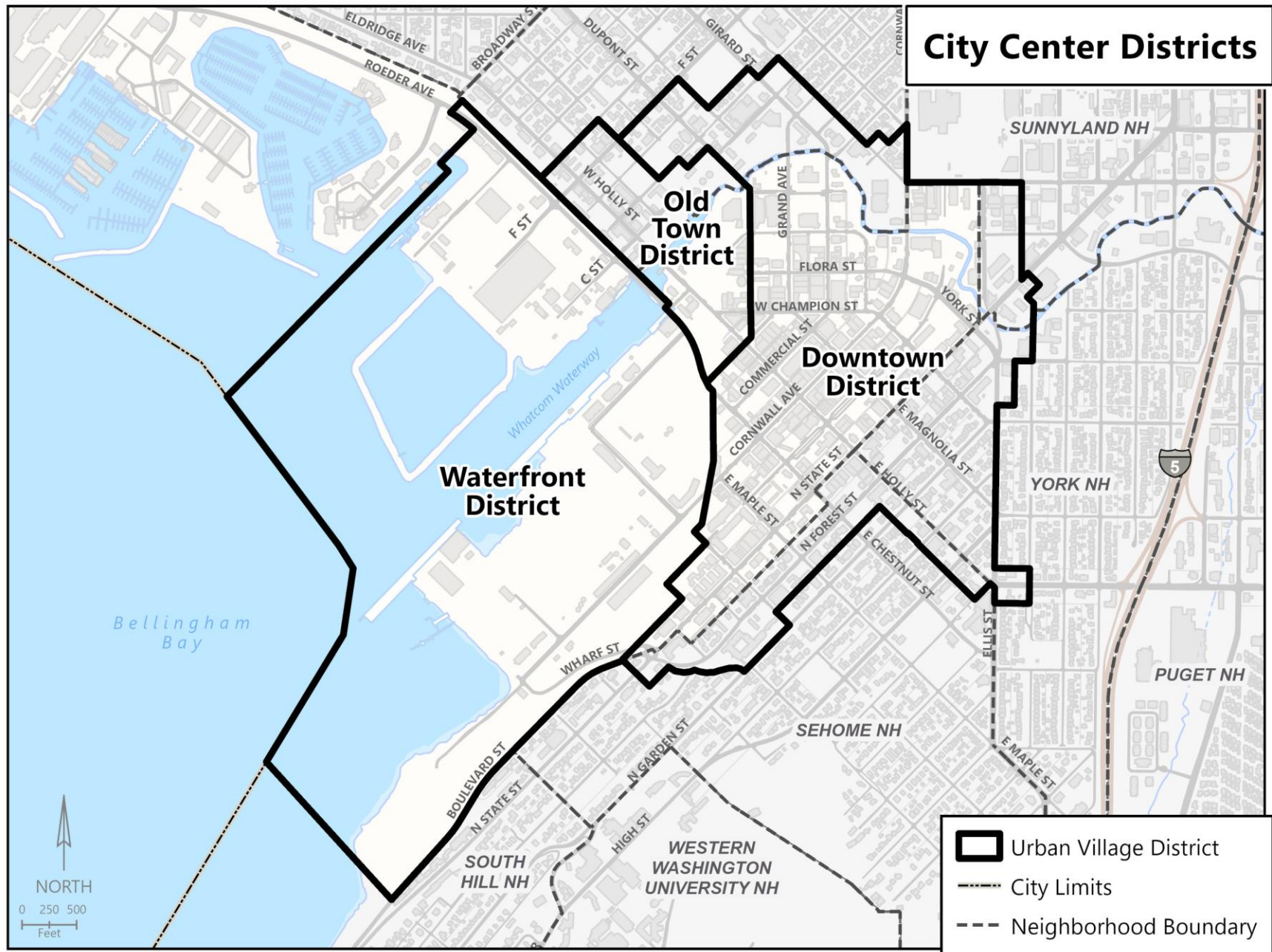


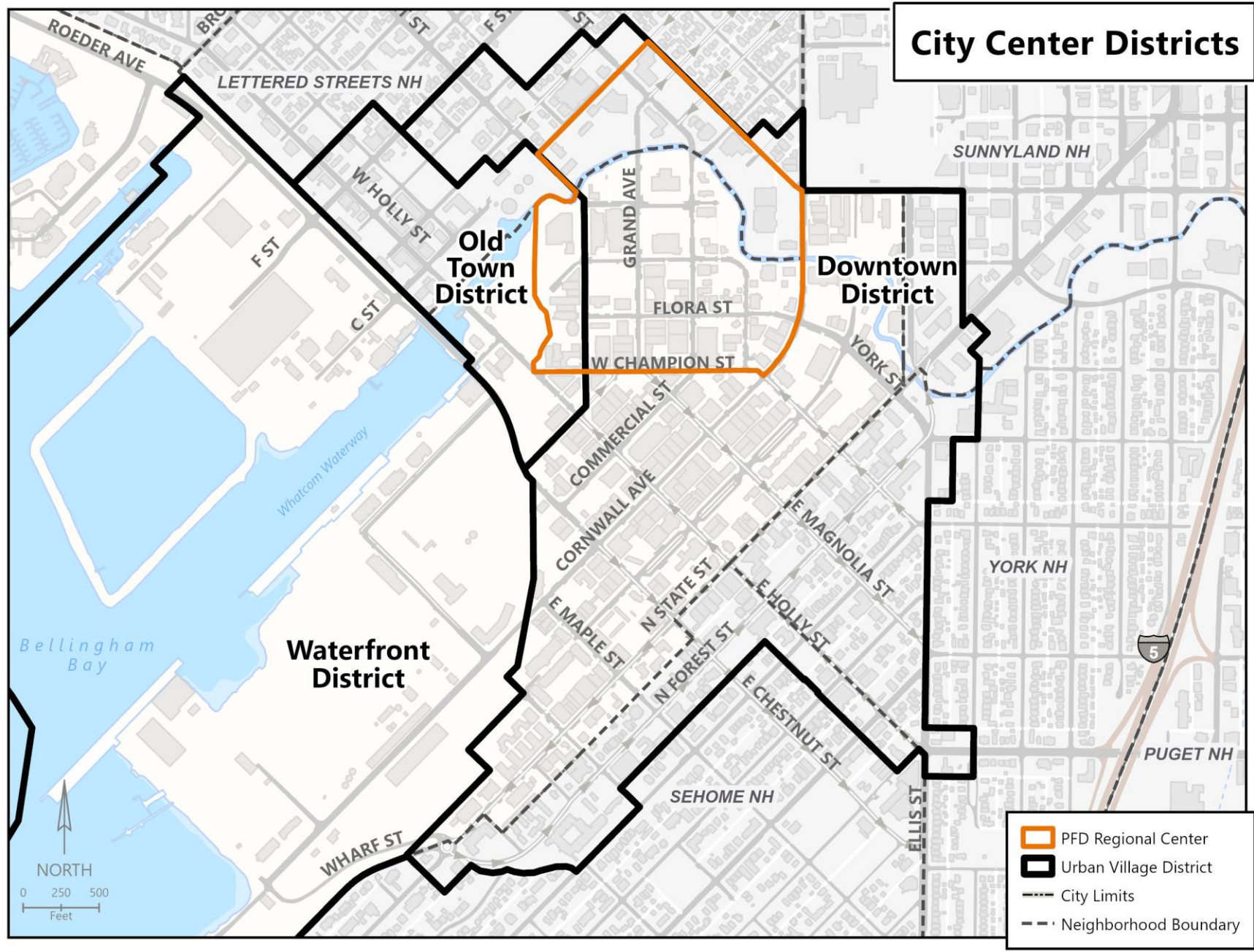
- The location and purpose of Downtown, Old Town, and the Waterfront District.
- The formal and informal districts/areas.
- Housing, employment & vacancy trends.
- Key adopted plans guiding future investment.
- The existing and future connections between the districts
- The significance of the Arts District and cultural assets within the City Center.

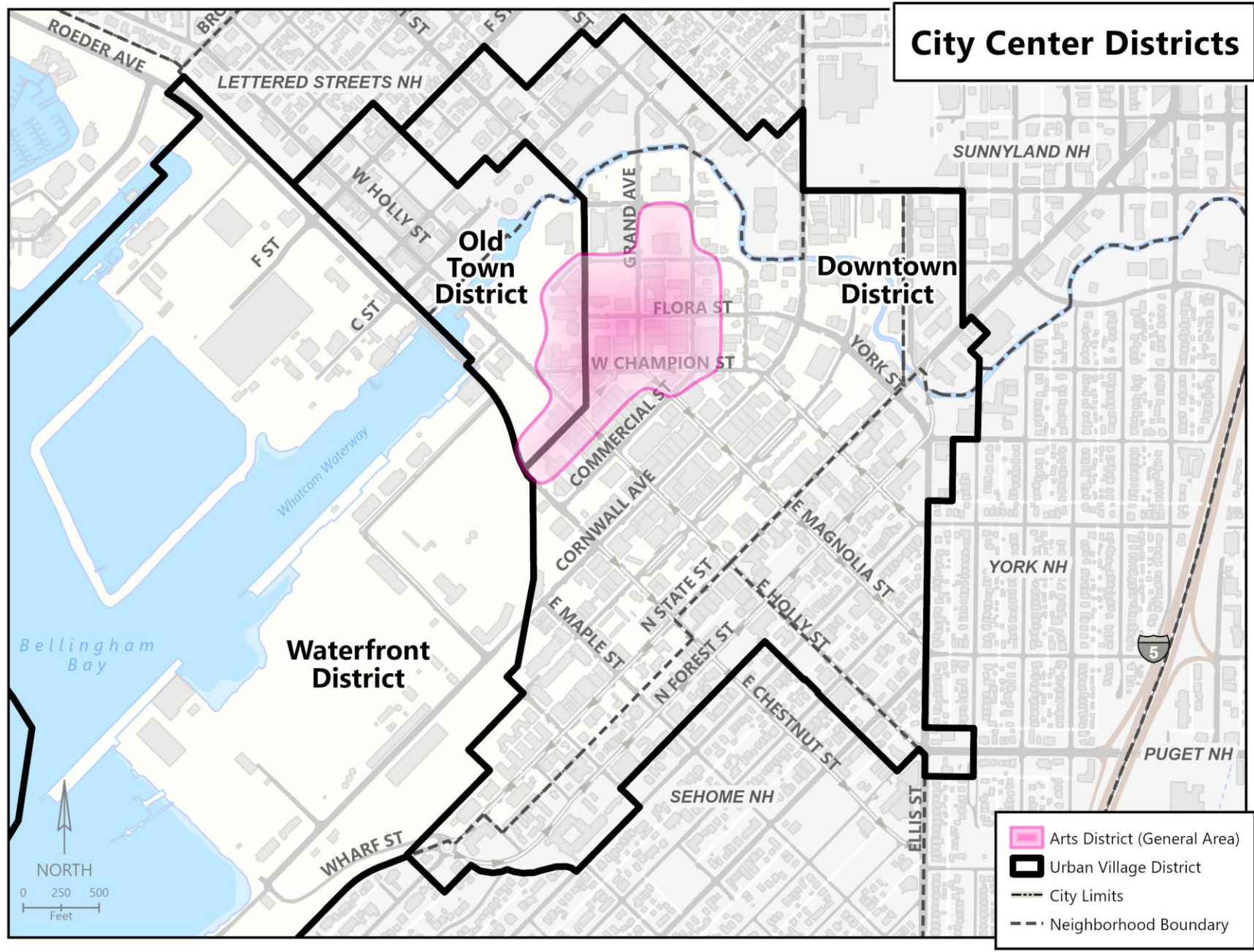
Bellingham Plan

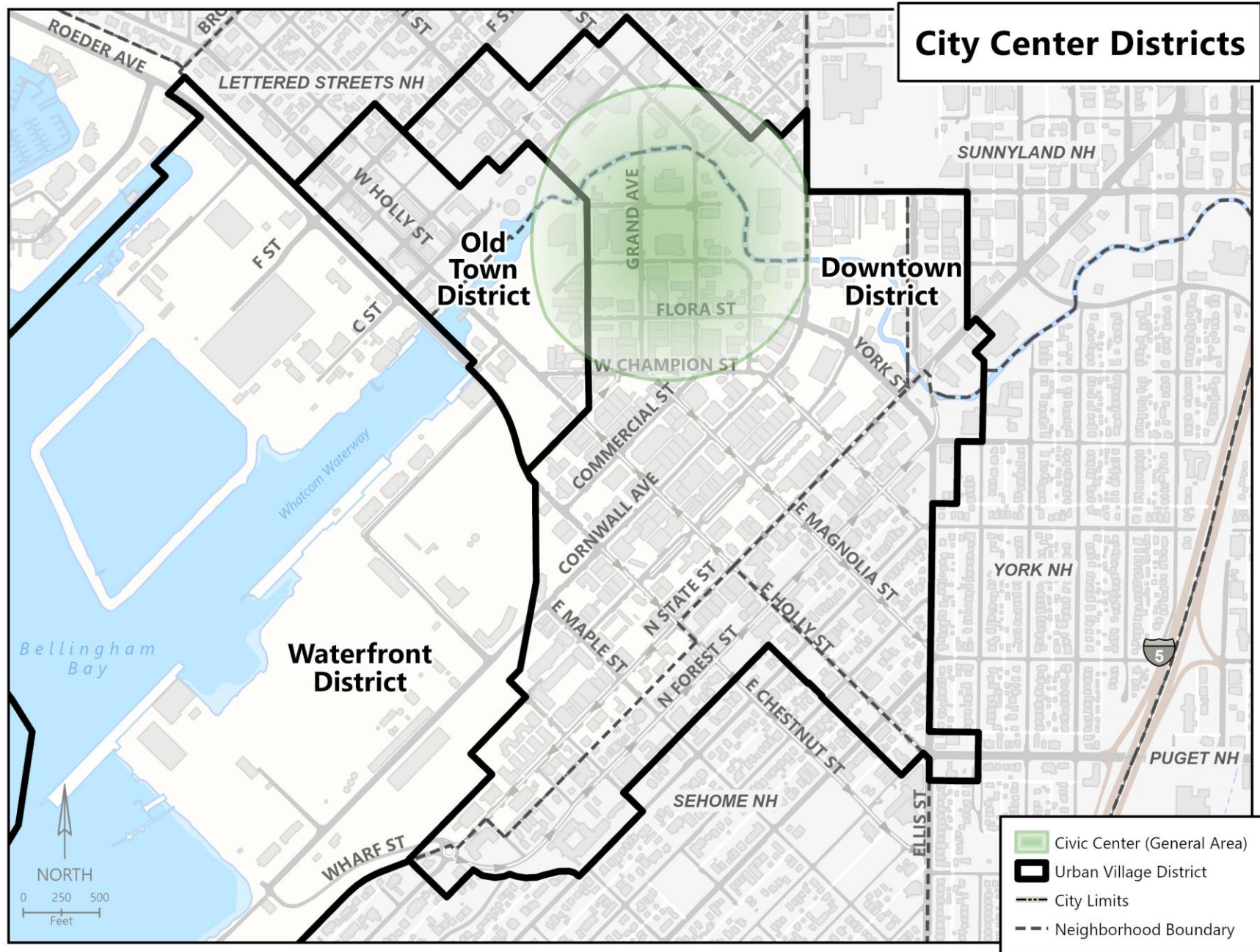
- **LU-23:** Ensure that Bellingham's City Center (i.e. Downtown, Waterfront and Old Town Districts) retains its unique role as the dominant and attractive cultural, civic, employment and service center for the community and region.
- **ED-21:** Partner with the Bellingham Whatcom Public Facilities District to continue investing in the City Center to foster a thriving creative economy that attracts visitors, nurtures local talent, and stimulates economic opportunities across multiple sectors.



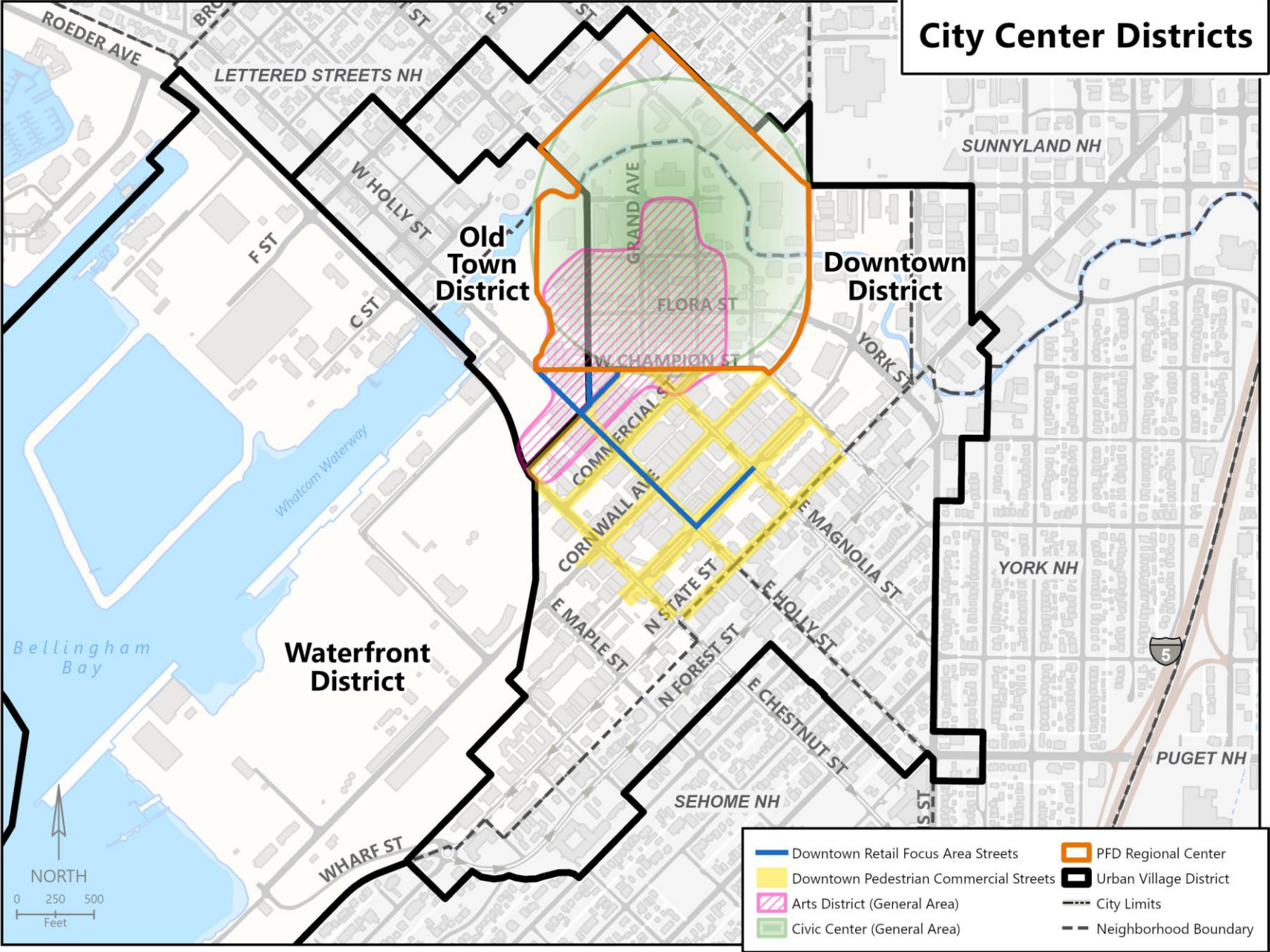








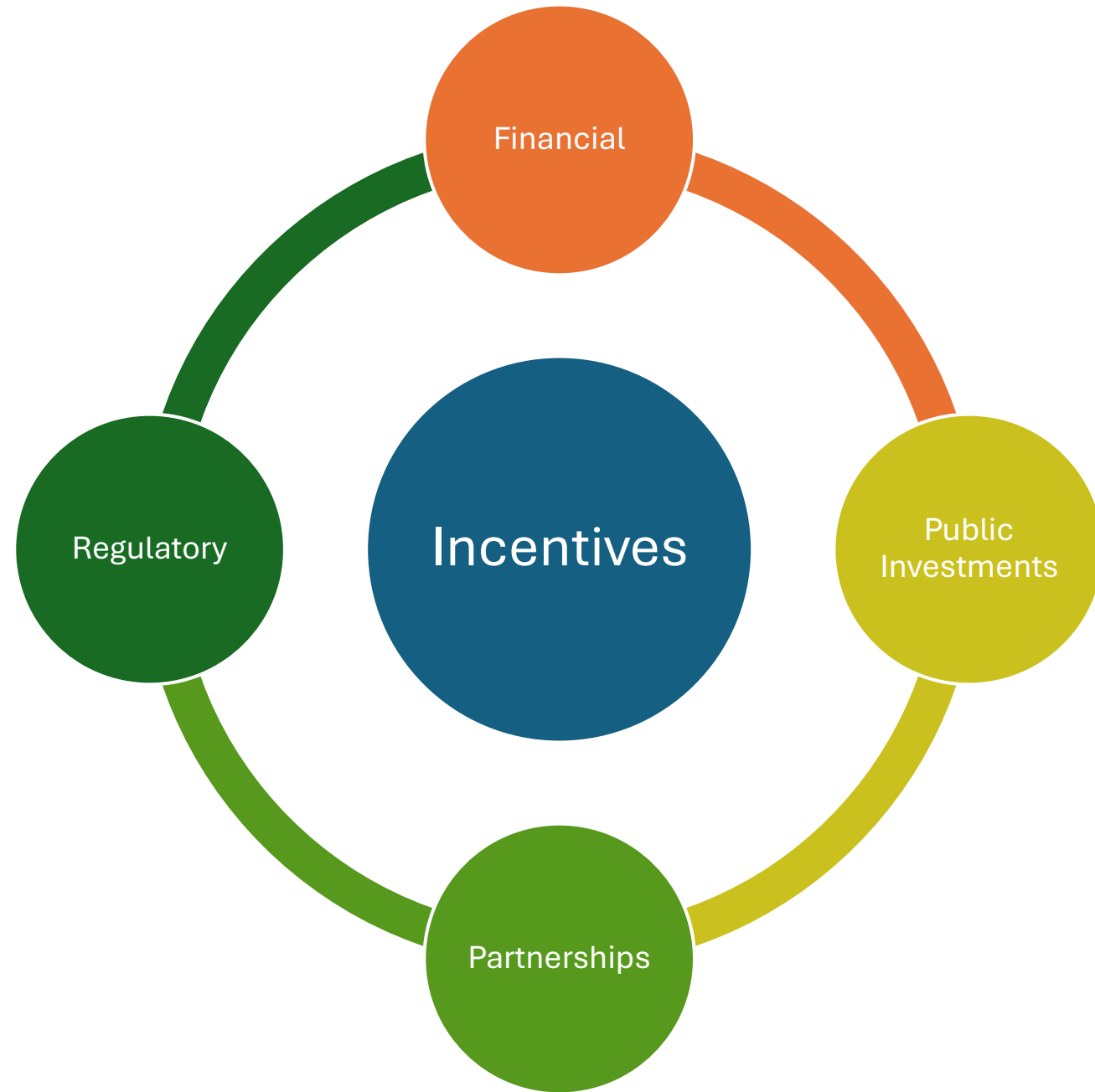
City Center Districts



URBAN VILLAGE DASHBOARD



	Downtown	Old Town	Waterfront
Population	4,614	184	187
Housing Units	2,418, 1,422 since 2006	87, + 202 in application or under construction	110, +76 under construction
Jobs/Businesses	8,778	477	1,123
Civic/Public (arts/cultural later in presentation)	City Hall, Police Dept, Library, Muni Court, Whatcom County Courthouse/ Office Buildings	BTC Perry Ellis Center/Hatchery, Whatcom Creek Estuary	Port facilities, Technology Development Center/BTC
Park & Public Spaces	Depot Market Square, Library Lawn	Maritime Heritage Park	Pump Track, Waypoint Park, Salish Landing Underway



Financial Incentives

Multi-family tax exemption

- Most effective tool for encouraging housing. 8-year property tax exemption on value of new market rate housing, 12- 20-year for affordable housing.

Federal Opportunity Zone

- Tax benefits when capital gains are reinvested into targeted areas, including portions of downtown, the waterfront and Samish Way UV

B&O Tax Exemptions and Credits – existing and coming soon

- Currently, new businesses within downtown receive a graduated tax credit each year (90%, 75%, 50%).
- Proposed expansion of the extent of the credit in the downtown pedestrian core
- State Main Street Program provides a B&O tax credit to businesses that donate to the Downtown Bellingham Partnership

Fee Reductions

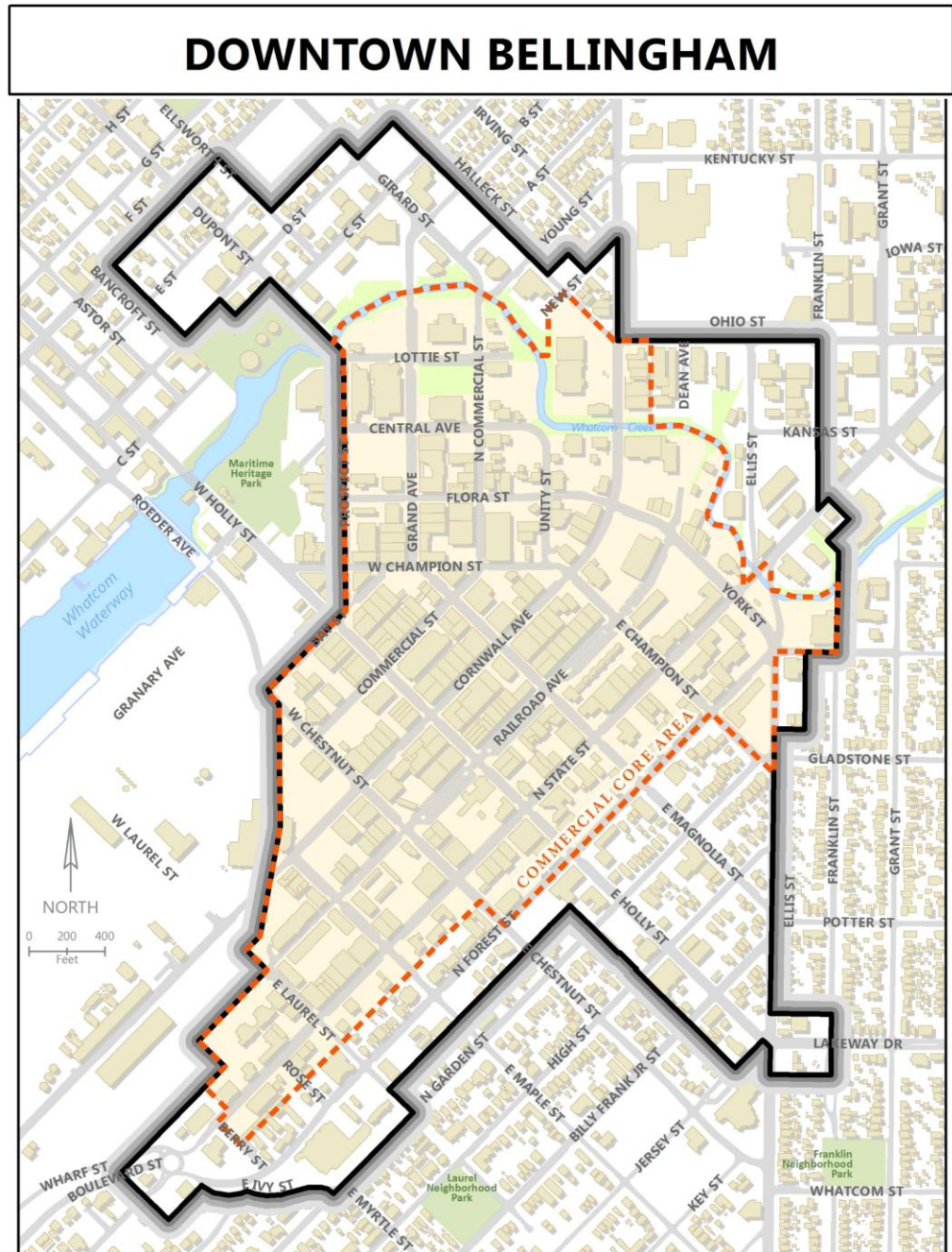
- Transportation Impact Fees (TIF) automatically reduced for projects in urban areas

Historic Tax Incentives

- Special Valuation is a 10 year tax reduction for eligible improvements to historic buildings
- Federal Historic Tax credits – up to 20% for income-producing projects for buildings listed on the National Register
- Other historic incentives includes flexible building codes (IEBC) and approval of uses not otherwise allowed under zoning

DOWNTOWN

- Economic Activity
- Employment Center
- Retail and Entertainment Hub
- Housing Growth
- Civic Center
- Cultural Activity





DOWNTOWN FORWARD

It starts in the heart 

**Our goals: Downtown
Bellingham is a neighborhood
for everyone because it ...**

- Is safe and welcoming
- Has active public spaces and thriving arts and culture
- Is a top location to work, shop and invest
- Is walkable, bikeable and resilient
- Is a desirable, lively and affordable neighborhood to live in.



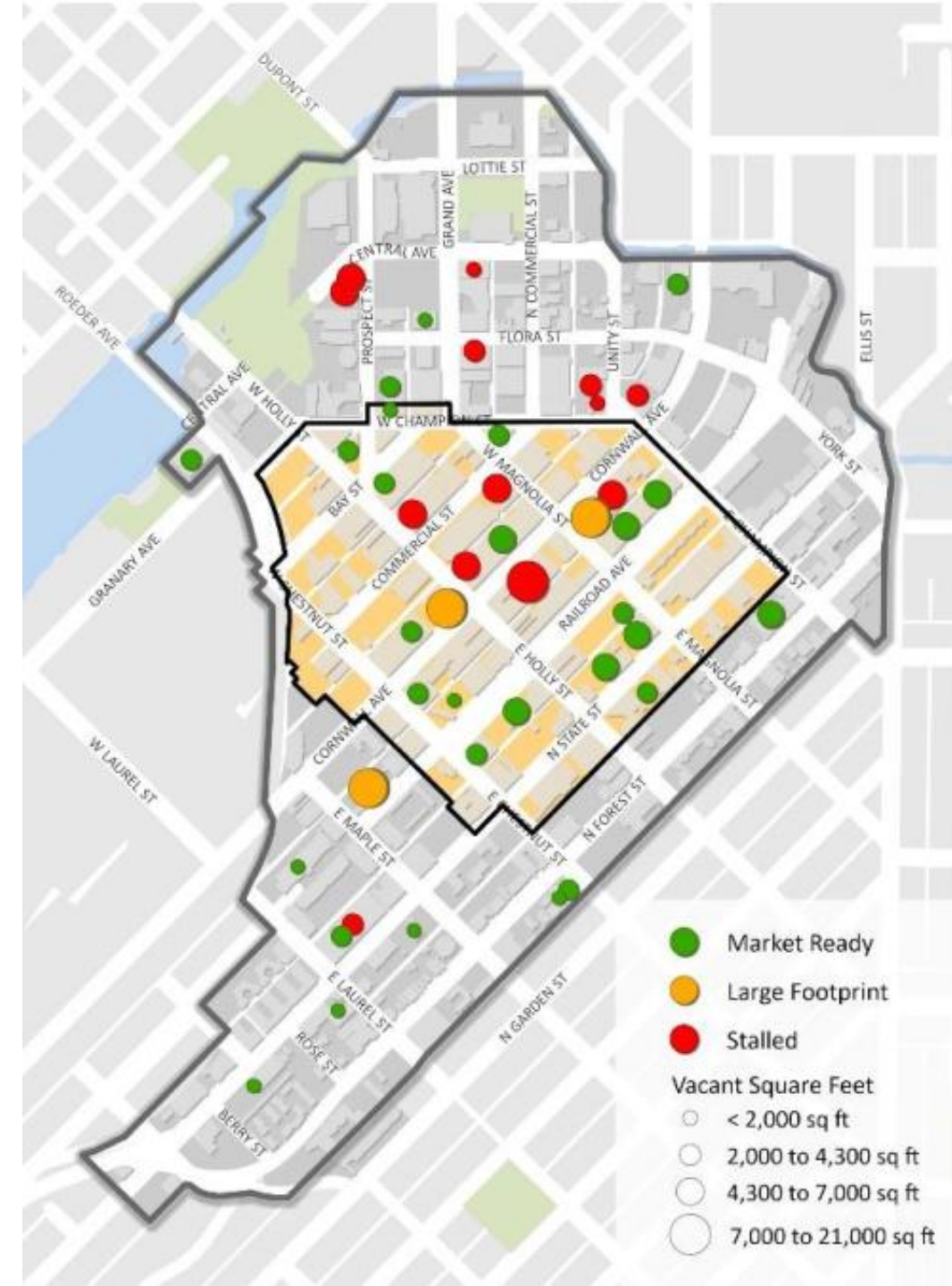
Downtown Vacancy Study + Strategy

Current conditions: 10% overall / 14.6% in pedestrian core.
Other contributing factors (surface parking, inactive uses, etc)

Causes: Changing retail landscape, costs of doing business, large downtown, property owner dynamics

Opportunities: Recent investments, successful clusters, business owner skill and creativity

Strategies: Deeper incentives/better promotion, adjust ground floor commercial requirements, broker/owner networking, business advocate, vibrancy investments



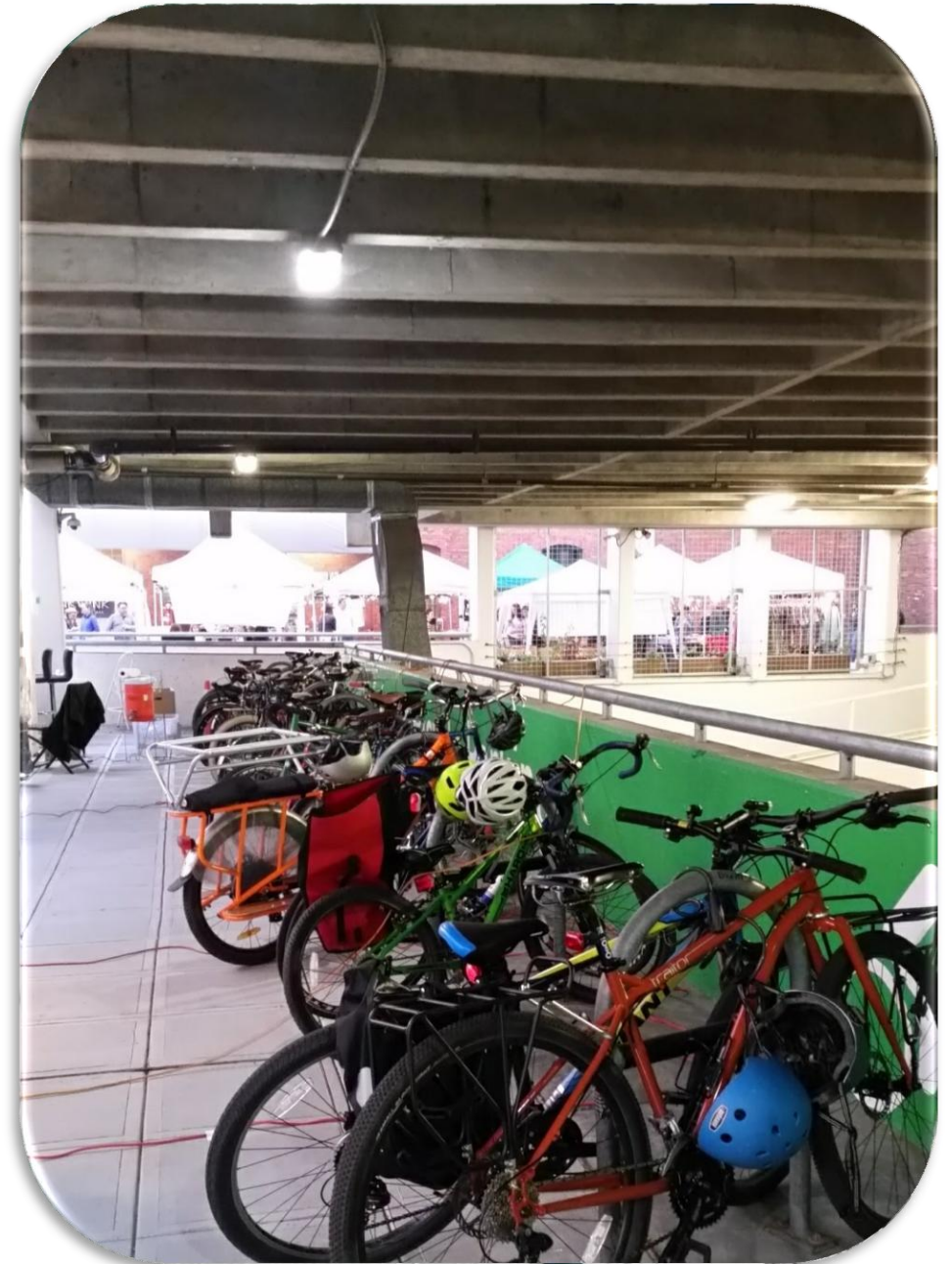
Downtown Connections Plan

Transportation + Land Use Vision: Align visions from policy documents – how can investments be mutually beneficial?

Transportation Hierarchy and Network: Data based + stakeholder informed.

Project Identification and Prioritization: With community feedback, concept designs and cost estimates

Implementation: Including a financial plan using local, state and federal funding sources



OLD TOWN



Create a vibrant, mixed-use neighborhood that blends housing, shops, services, and employment opportunities while preserving Old Town's unique character and eclectic feel.

Transform Old Town into a walkable, attractive urban district that connects downtown and the waterfront, emphasizes pedestrian-friendly streets and public spaces and natural resources and respects important views and historic landmarks.

Development Agreements



Parberry Inc. Agreement - 2020

The City helps remove infrastructure and land-assembly barriers, while Parberry commits to relocating/winding down an industrial use and redeveloping a large portion of Old Town.

This agreement sets the stage to attract developers and investors to the area.

Old Town Village Agreement - 2023

Implements the next phase of the Old Town vision after the Parberry land holdings were acquired by the development team. The agreement is intended to transform approximately eight blocks of Old Town into a dense mixed-use neighborhood with housing and commercial uses.

This agreement creates predictability and reduces additional barriers to develop.

Recent Investments

Lighthouse Mission Ministries

Services and shelter for up to 300 unsheltered community members and a coffee shop for the general public.

Parberry Iron & Metal

Renovated upper story to add 11 apartments, converted ground floor into a museum.

TG Richards Building

Brad Parberry restored the building and opened the Helen Loggie Museum and developed a trolley courtyard at Holly and E streets.

Other restorations/façade improvements within the District.



Underway



Leasing NOW! Ironworks at Old Town

84 housing units and commercial 700 block of Holly.

Coming Soon

74 units of housing for low-income seniors.

104 units on the 800 block of Holly.



WATERFRONT DISTRICT



Transform a former heavy industrial waterfront into a vibrant mixed-use district that reconnects downtown Bellingham with Bellingham Bay through new housing, employment centers, shops, restaurants, parks, trails, and public gathering spaces.

The vision turns the former Georgia-Pacific mill site from a largely inaccessible industrial property into an active, walkable extension of the city.

Balance redevelopment with environmental restoration and working-waterfront uses. The plan calls for cleaning up contaminated industrial lands, restoring shoreline habitat and public access, celebrating the site's industrial heritage, and retaining significant areas for marine trades, boatbuilding, maritime industries, and other water-dependent businesses that continue to support Bellingham's waterfront economy.

Figure 4-4: Waterfront District Urban Village Land Use

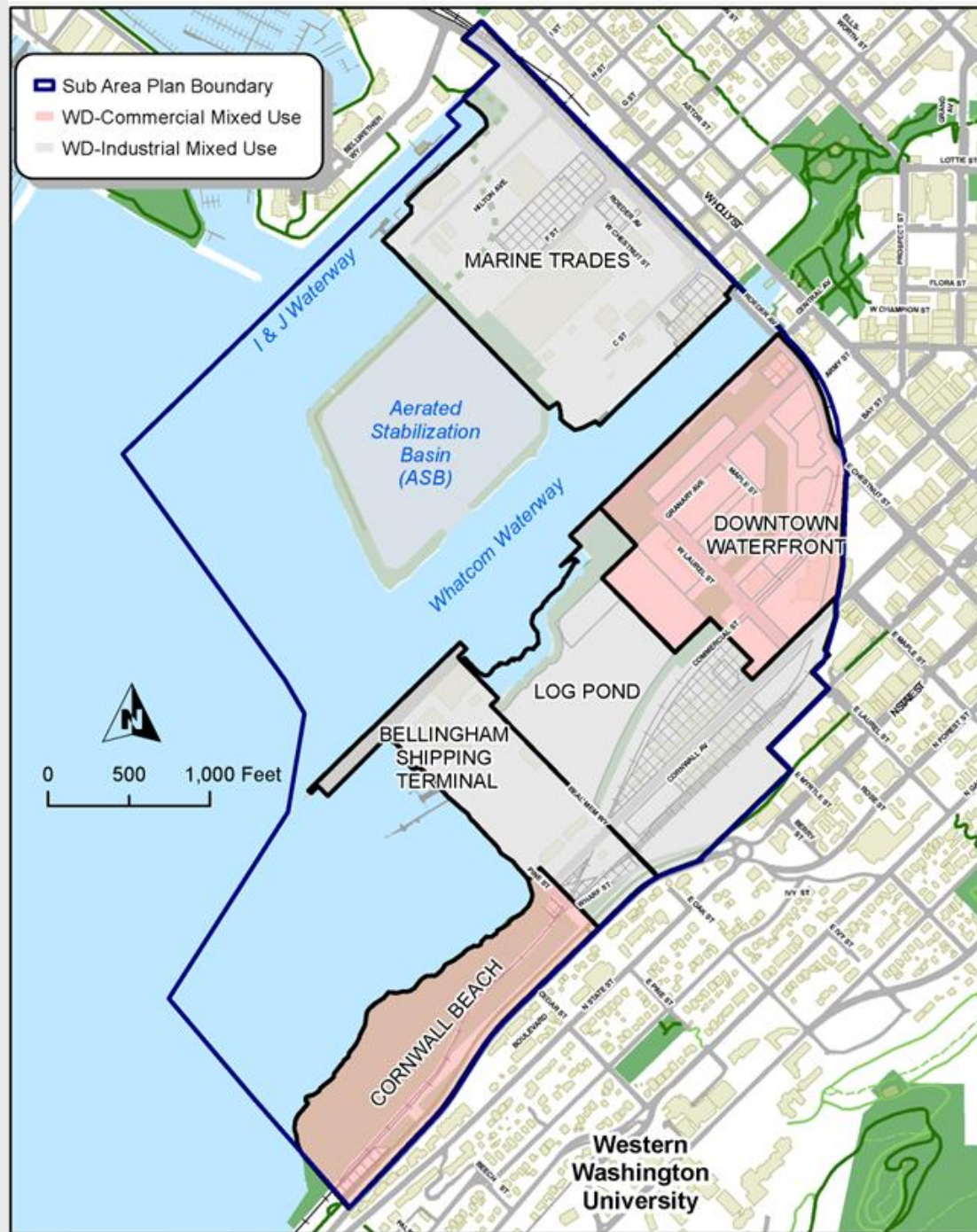
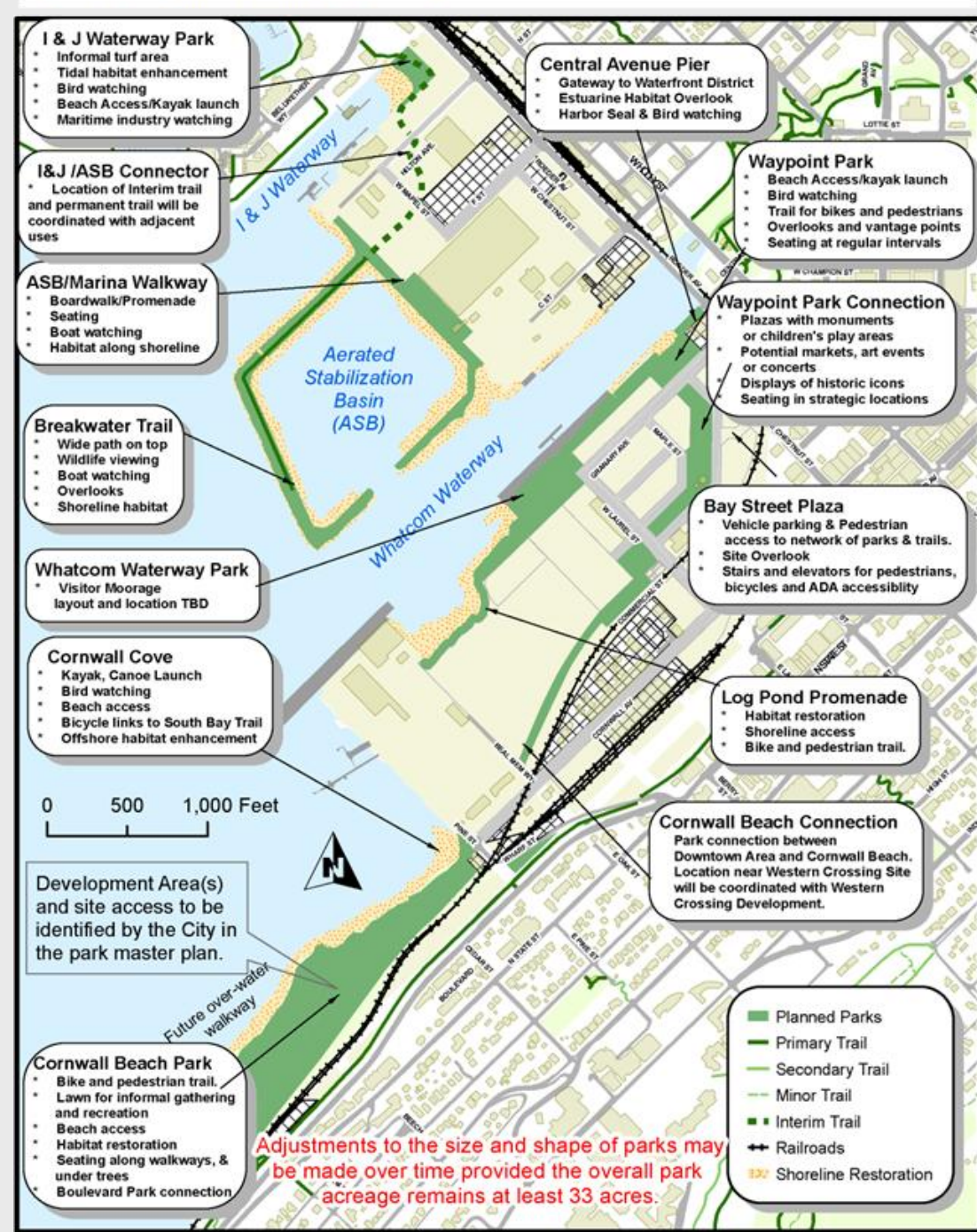


Figure 7-1: Parks, Open Space & Trails



City Port Partnership



Development Agreement

the rulebook for how the Waterfront District will be built over time, providing regulatory certainty while implementing the adopted master plan

City Port Interlocal Agreement

the business agreement between the City and Port, specifying who is responsible for delivering the roads, utilities, parks, public spaces, cleanup coordination, and other public facilities needed to make the Waterfront District possible.

Currently operating under agreements dated **2019**, with subsequent amendments to the Interlocal.

Investments in the Downtown Waterfront Area

The Port and partners created a **pump track** and a **container village** showcasing a variety of local food and beverage businesses.

The City developed **Waypoint Park** and built **Granary Avenue** and **Laurel Street**.



"Trackside Twilight" by Mark Caicedo

Investments in the Downtown Waterfront Area

Granary Building Harcourt renovated the historic building – home to a variety of business.

Millworks – Phase 1 Housing for low-income families and childcare.

Harcourt Condominiums The first of three condominium buildings is complete with two more underway.



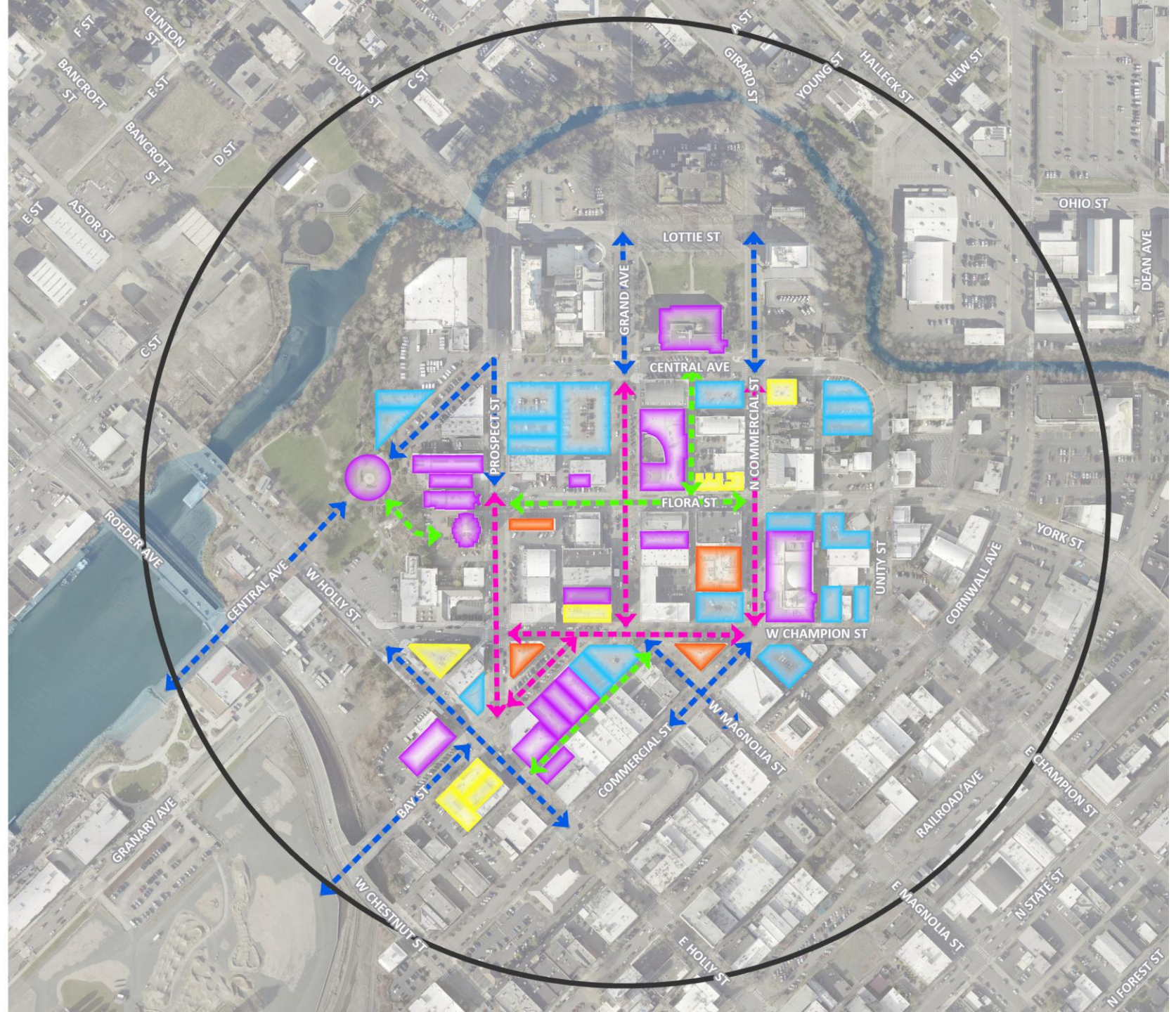
Underway – District-wide

- Plan Amendment for the Marine Trades Area
- Shipping Terminal Improvements/Rail Spur
- RG Haley/Cornwall Cleanup and Phase 1 of Salish Landing
- Wharf Street / Pine Street Improvements
- Millworks Phase 2 – Housing, Offices and Food Campus (Private)
- Boardmill Redevelopment – Hotel and Housing
- Development Strategy
- Skatepark



Arts District

-  Cultural Destinations
-  Other Iconic Buildings
-  Residential
-  Surface Parking
-  Primary Pedestrian Connectors
-  Pedestrian Connectors to Other Districts
-  Secondary Pedestrian Connectors
-  1/4 Mile (~15 min walk distance)



Whatcom Museum Campus: Lightcatcher, Old City Hall, Old Fire Station #1

The Whatcom Museum serves as a bridge among diverse people, ideas, and traditions by fostering curiosity and joy about our world. We do this through exhibitions, events, educational programs, and collections reflective of the art, nature, Indigenous cultures, and history of our region and beyond.





Mount Baker Theatre 1927

The Mount Baker Theatre Organization enriches our region's culture through dynamic performances and arts education — inspiring community engagement and the stewardship of a national historic treasure.

Setting Sun Circle

Coming soon!

“A new home for Indigenous innovation, healing and collective action” and “a space where storytelling, innovation, and Indigenous Knowledge meet the urgent challenges of our time.”



“Storytelling” photo by Jessie Bloss

Spark Museum



.."an educational museum dedicated to preserving, displaying and interpreting the history of electricity, radio, and related technologies" through exhibits, demonstrations, collections, and hands-on experiences

Pickford Film Center

Bay and Grand
locations

Pickford Film Center offers film series, educational programs, special events, festivals, and screenings that “celebrate the art of cinema in all its forms.”





Makeshift

“Our mission is to engage the community by providing all-ages spaces for art and music in Whatcom and Skagit Counties.

New Prospect Theatre

Includes Upfront Theatre

New Prospect: “We believe that live theatre, art, storytelling, dance and music are inspiring, uplifting and essential parts of our community.”

Upfront: “Our mission is to entertain, educate and connect our community through the craft of improvisation and the gift of play.”



Private Galleries, Museums, Venues and Studios

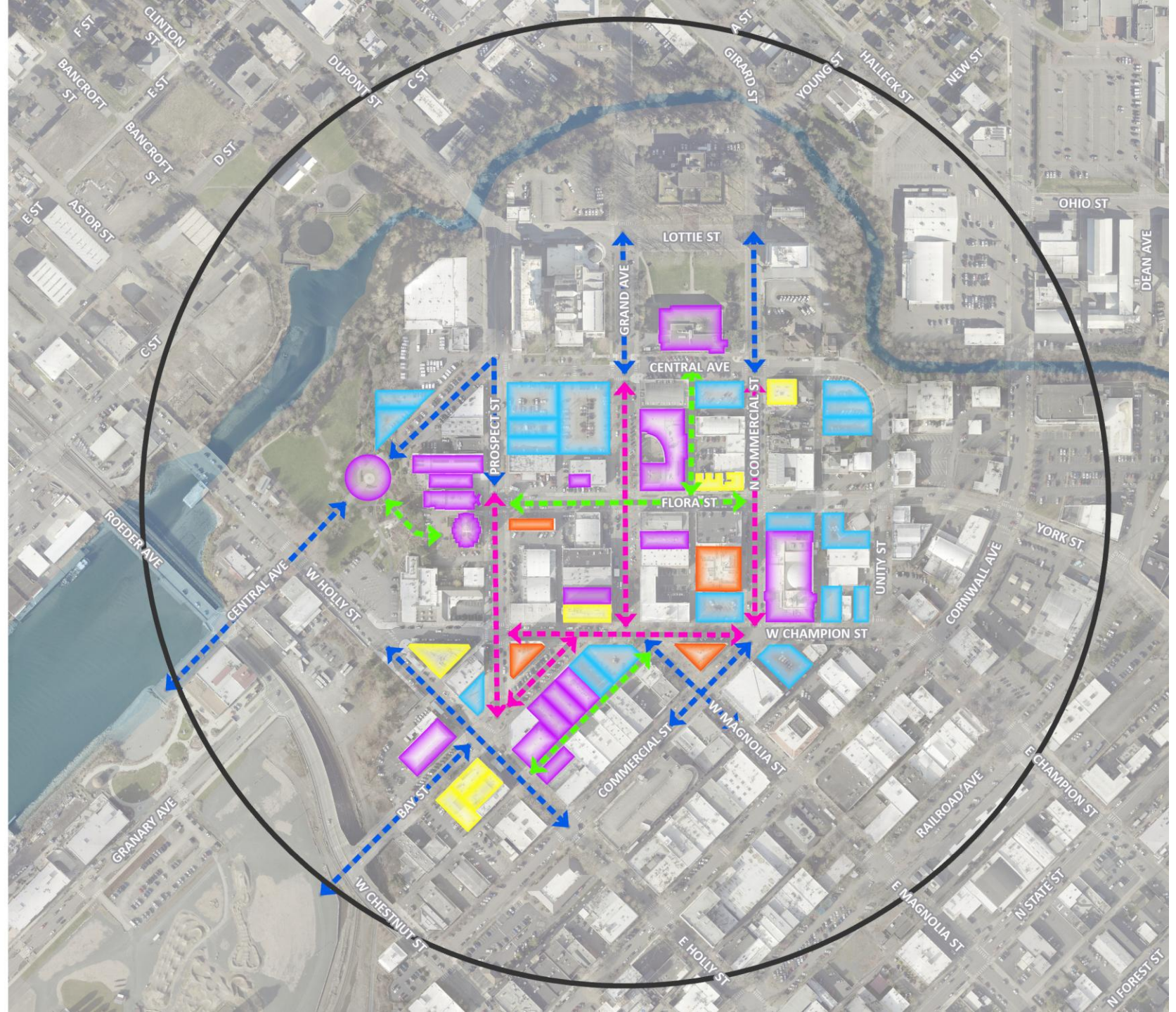
Sample list: Wild Buffalo, Voxel Gallery,
Geheim Gallery, Sharon Kingston Art Studio
and Gallery, Trish Harding School of Art

Nearby: BAAY, MUD Ceramics, Museo,
Helen Loggie Museum of Art, MUD Studio,
Dakota Art Store and Gallery, Shakedown



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Q & A

Education Series Part 2: ?? Tourism Strategy, Cultural Tourism Strategy, Tourism Impact, Creative District

Education Series Part 3: ?? Other PFD's or Downtown Bellingham Partnership?

Events and Festivals



