

BELLINGHAM CIVIC ATHLETIC COMPLEX MASTER PLAN

A PARK FOR ALL OF BELLINGHAM



February 2026

CIVIC STADIUM

CITY OF BELLINGHAM

PERIOD [8]	T.O.L. [8]	TIME TO PLAY [8] [8] [8]	T.O.L. [8]
BALL ON [8]	DOWN [8]	YDS TO GO [8]	



Bellingham
Red Raiders



SQUALICUM
STORM



SEHOME
MARINERS



WWU
VIKINGS

Executive Summary

So many of us in Bellingham have stories that intersect with the City's Civic Athletic Complex. Whether taking part in a senior swim class, making new friends through an adult recreation league, celebrating a high school triumph, or playing in that first Little League game, this special place has hosted thousands of cherished memories for generations of Bellinghamsters.

Now, we are reimagining Civic Athletic Complex to leave a legacy for generations and memories yet to come. This Master Plan positions Civic as the premier recreation hub in Bellingham, for sporting events and so much more – community gatherings, trips to the playground, enrichment classes, or walks through the woods. It is a long-term vision for a recreational campus that is human-scaled and welcoming, that highlights and stewards the natural environment, and that enriches our local economy and social connections.

This plan imagines the complex not as disparate recreation destinations, but as a lively, connected, and diverse campus that is filled with locals and visitors who are drawn to a rich offering new and improved amenities. We envision it as a place where everyone can find a way to recreate at any of the key destinations – with invitations to linger, explore, and connect along the way.

Developed through a series of deeply collaborative community conversations, this new plan establishes both a design framework and a flexible implementation strategy. We are committed to making this plan a reality, and as we phase this work over many years, we look forward to the upgrades to existing amenities and the new and expanded opportunities it will bring.

We thank everyone who helped nurture it into existence over the past year for your continued dedication to improving the quality of life in our beloved city.

Yours in service,



Mayor Kim Lund

Credits



Consortium Members

Amanda Ager
Bill Ziels
Brad Jones
Carissa Jangard
Chet Lackey
Chris Coghill
Chris Fuhrman
Corey Ayers
Curtis Lawyer
Deron Belt
Doug Gustafson
Dylan-Dean Boyle
Eric Rainaud-Hinds

Gary Hatch
Jackie Brawley
James Hayes
Jason Conway
Jessica Sankey
John Westerfield
Katharine Bothel
Mark Lackey
Neil McCarthy
Skip Williams
Stephanie Morrell
Suneeta Eisenburg
Marc Ronney

Kait Whiteside
Steven Brummel
Josh Barrett
Ali Taysi
Bennett Knox
Brian Bressler
Ray Dellecker
Sean Stimac
Ashley Hulburt
Hayden Richardson
Collin Whalen
Jessica Stone

City Stakeholders

Nicole Oliver
Alex King

Melissa Bianconi
Melissa Morin

Laine Potter

Prepared By



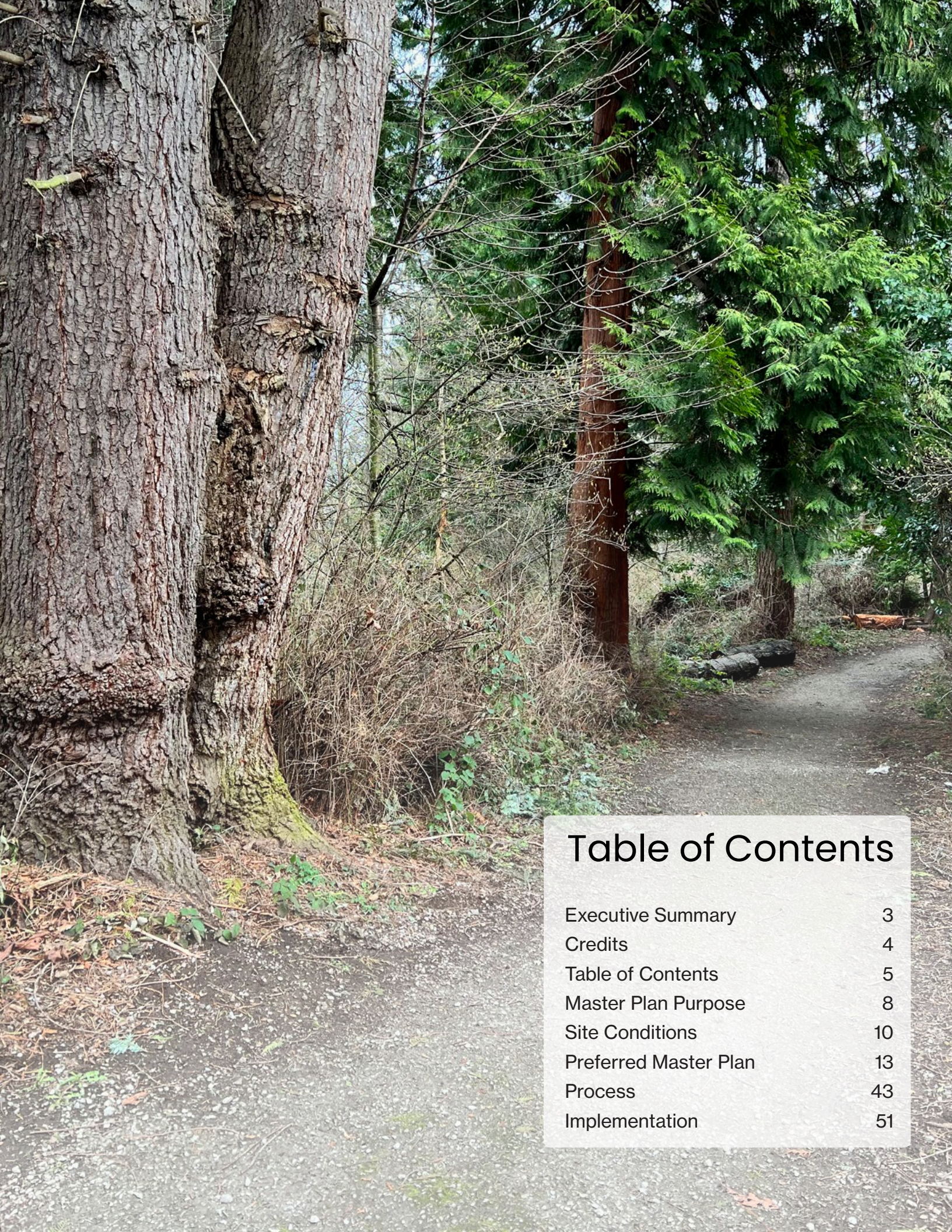


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Master Plan

Purpose

This Master Plan is a result of recommendations rooted in the 2022 Recreation Needs Assessment and in the City's Parks, Recreation and Open Space (PROS) planning processes. This Master Plan will guide future development at the Civic Athletic Complex by establishing a blueprint vision that transforms the park from disconnected complex to a green, user-friendly, human-scaled and modern athletic campus. These new connected facilities will support the long-term recreational needs of Bellingham while promoting resilient sustainability strategies to protect air, water, and wildlife.

The Civic Athletic Complex is an exceptionally well-used park, hosting everything from softball tournaments to high school football games; Western Washington University (WWU) track and field meets to Bellingham Bells baseball games; swim meets to hockey matches to community celebrations and special events. Of all of Bellingham's parks, Civic sees almost twice the number of visitors of Lake Padden and Boulevard Parks' combined: some 83,000 monthly visitors, based on 2025 Placer.ai data.

In addition to these recreation amenities, the site hosts the confluence of several small streams, wetlands, and forests that contribute to the health of Whatcom Creek and Bellingham Bay. It is a microcosm of so much of what Bellingham holds dear: shaded forests and health-promoting athletics, camaraderie and connections.

As Bellingham continues to grow, the public's demands for the Civic Athletic Complex's built and natural amenities will also increase. Its current assets – buildings, fields, facilities – will need to be reimagined, repositioned and, in some cases, reconsidered to better serve the needs of the Bellingham community.



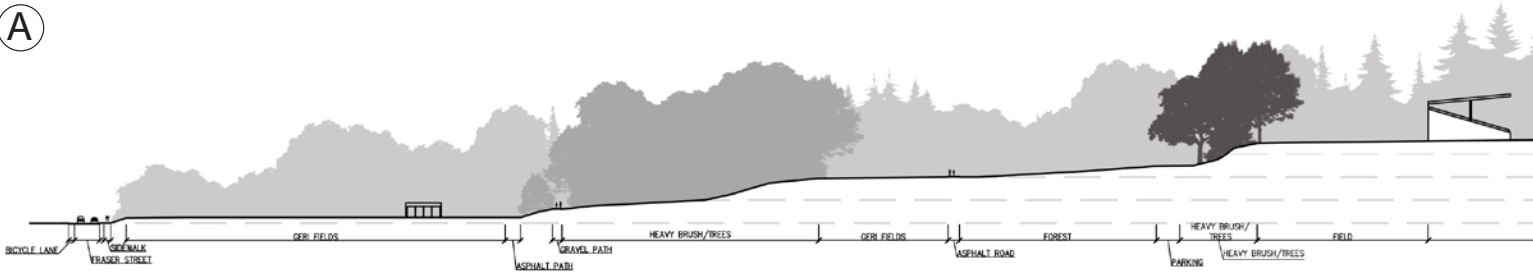
Live music and events frequently take place at Civic Field.

To address those needs, the City developed this plan through extensive engagement with the Bellingham community. Through an exhaustive public engagement process, the City collaborated with the existing users of the Civic Athletic Complex, parents from Carl Cozier Elementary School, administrators from Bellingham Public Schools, and the broader public's various athletic constituencies to both vet and refine the plan to the vision presented here.

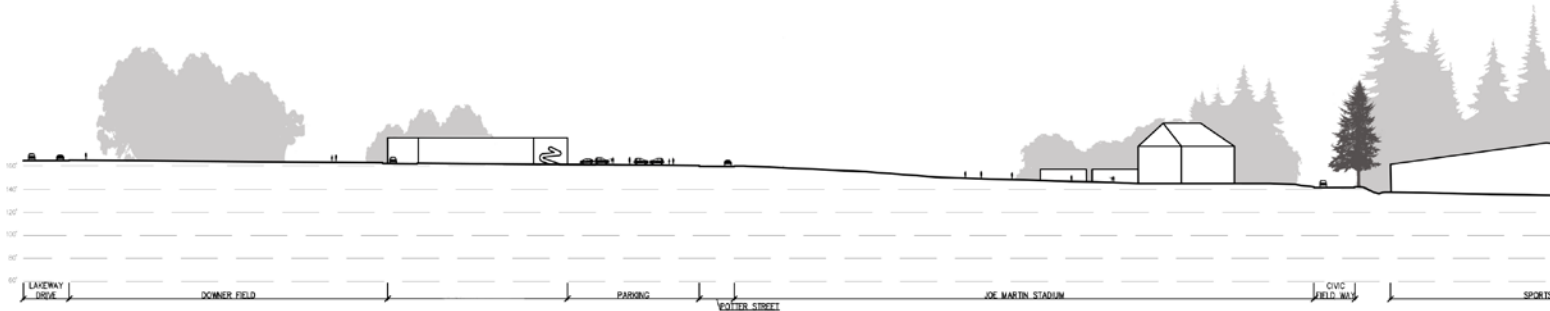
During this process, the City and Bellingham Public Schools initiated a unique partnership to evaluate the possibility of relocating Carl Cozier Elementary School, currently located at the corner of Lincoln Street and Lakeway Drive, elsewhere within the Civic Athletic Complex. Through shared investments, the City and school district hope to create better outcomes for children, families and the broader community. The current elementary school is in need of replacement, and moving the school site could open the potential to expand recreation or other opportunities along a key city corridor, as well as better meeting the needs of the school community.

This Master Plan establishes a long-term vision that is both ambitious and achievable. In the final section of this document, we outline various pathways toward implementation, including a potential phasing plan that will help all of the partners and stakeholders make this blueprint for the Civic Athletic Campus a reality.

A



B

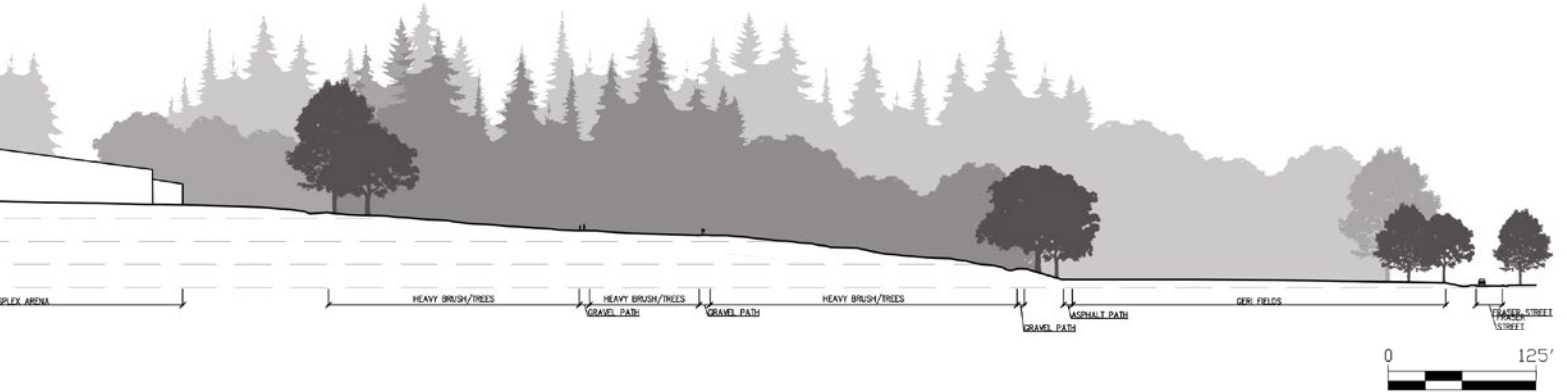
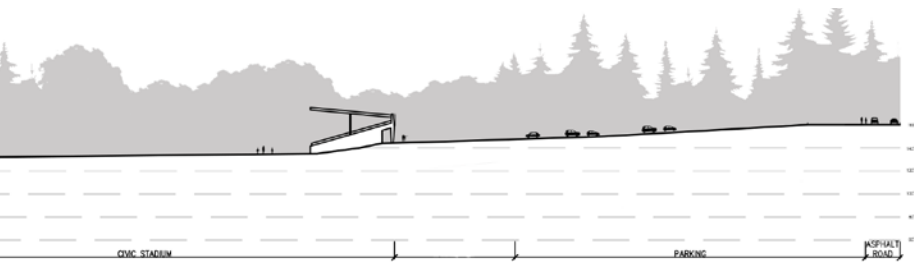


Site Conditions

During phase one of the Master Plan process, the City extensively documented and assessed the conditions of the natural and built facilities at the Civic Athletic Complex. The results of these conditions can be found at the back of this document in Appendix A and they are summarized below.

At the northern end of the site, the site hosts most of its natural assets. There are a number of tributaries of Whatcom Creek braiding through the forest and along drainage ditches adjacent to Fraser Street. These streams and associated wetlands occasionally flow under a mature forest canopy that has a number of established tree groves and various walking trails which extends approximately halfway up the western boundary of the site.

On the other end of the spectrum, there are a number of activity based or recreational facilities at the site including Civic Stadium which encloses Civic Field; the Sportsplex just west of Civic Stadium which holds an ice sheet and



Cross sections looking at existing conditions through the Civic Athletic Complex (above).

indoor soccer field; Joe Martin Stadium just south of the Sportsplex that hosts the Bellingham Bells; and Arne Hanna Aquatic Center at the southwest corner of the site. There are also various service buildings for maintenance support, gear storage and restrooms.

The various sports field complexes include the four Geri Fields at the north end of the site, Joe Martin field which sits directly south of the sportsplex, Civic Field and the throwing sports within and north of Civic Stadium, and Downer Fields which sit just east of Arne Hanna Aquatic Center. In addition to these organized sports facilities, there are both a dirt bike track and skate park at the southeast corner of the site for individual sports.

Just south of Civic Stadium the largest parking lot on the site covers nearly 5 acres. This centralized parking lot is supplemented by smaller lots near the Sportsplex, Arne Hanna Aquatics Center, Geri Field 4, and near Geri Field 1.

Lines indicate the cut and direction of view for both sections (below).





Preferred Master Plan

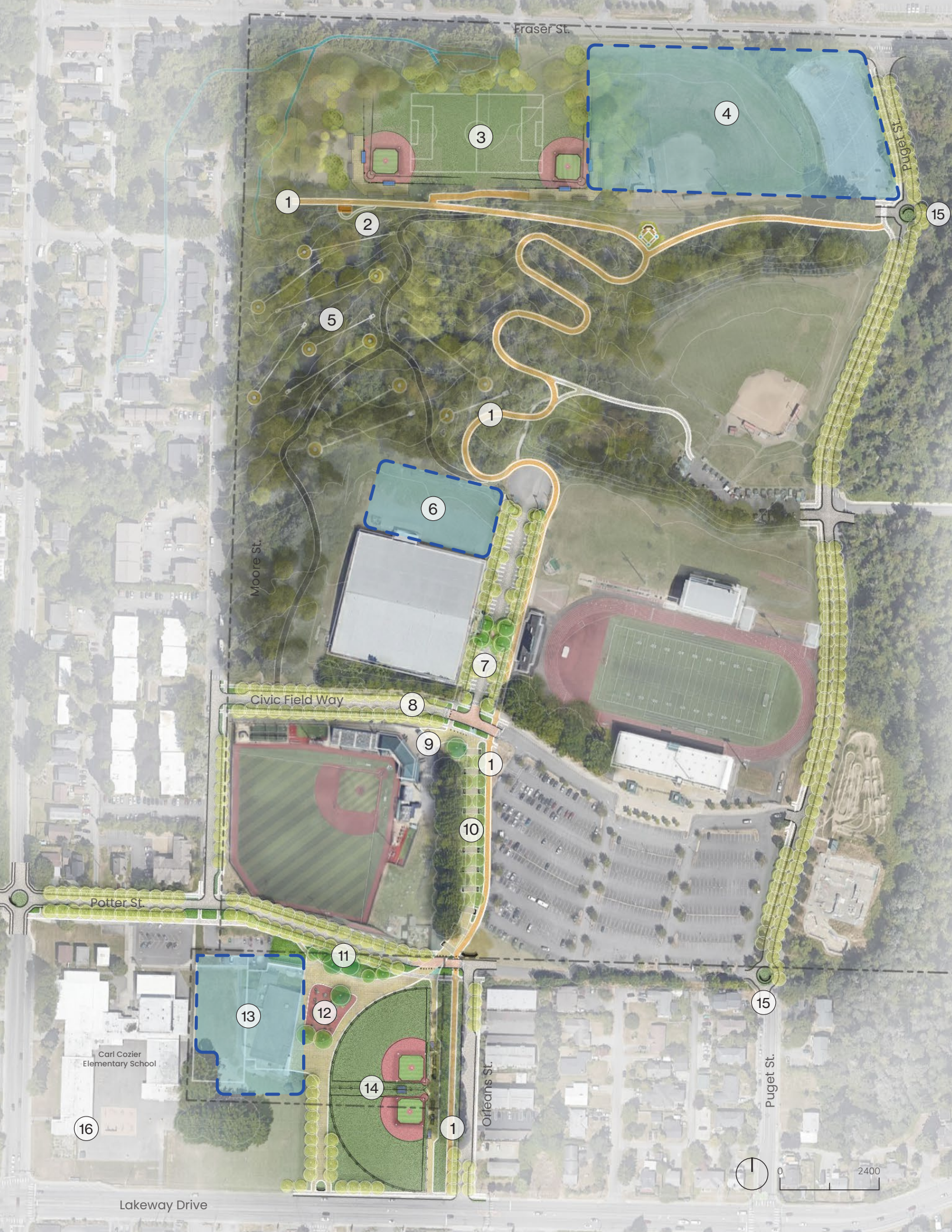
This preferred Master Plan is the first major update of the Civic Athletic Complex's guiding vision since the early 1980s. In the intervening four and a half decades, it's no exaggeration to say that the City has transformed. Bellingham has grown denser, Carl Cozier Elementary School has matured beyond its useful life, and requests for a community recreation center, covered athletic spaces, expanded aquatics offerings, and expanded sheets of ice have grown in both volume and urgency.

At the same time, the value of in-city natural resources like the streams, wetlands, forests and habitat in the northwest quadrant of the park have also increased as more density has come to Bellingham. New local, state and federal regulations have made protecting these resources a paramount consideration in thinking through what the opportunities are for the site to mature into its next phase.

In 2024, the City and school district entered an agreement to explore the community benefit and mutual interests of land purchases and sales that would allow the district to build a school at a new location within the Civic Athletic Complex. Under the agreement, the two organizations committed to evaluate the City selling to the district a portion of the Civic Athletic Complex to develop a new elementary school. In exchange, the district would, at a future date, sell to the City the property where Carl Cozier Elementary School is currently located. The master planning process offered the opportunity to discuss and vet the tradeoffs and benefits of this reconfiguration with community stakeholders and assess the best outcomes and advantages for all involved.

This Master Plan resolves all of these various constraints and inputs to propose a vision that improves legibility, efficiently organizes various program elements, expands athletic offerings, and creates a holistic campus that will serve the entire community for generations to come.

The following are some of the key components of the Master Plan:



Fraser St.

Puget St.

Moore St.

Civic Field Way

Potter St.

Orleans St.

Puget St.

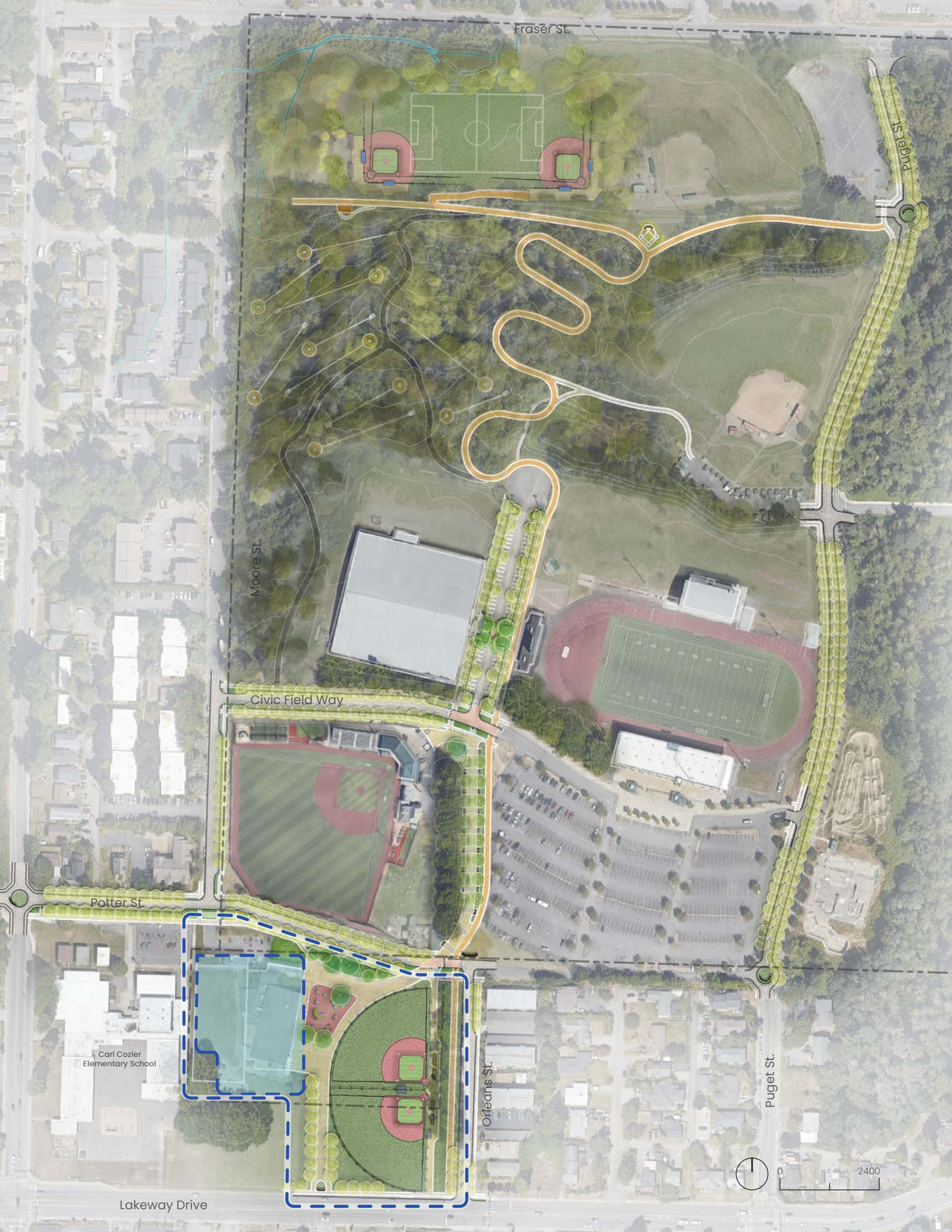
Lakeway Drive

Carl Cozler
Elementary School



Legend

- ① *All Ages and Abilities Shared Use Path*
- ② *Wetland Overlook*
- ③ *Multi-purpose Fields*
- ④ *Possible School Site*
- ⑤ *Possible Disc Golf Course or Exercise Trail in Existing Forest*
- ⑥ *Future Sportsplex Expansion or Fieldhouse Location*
- ⑦ *Reconfigured Parking Lot/Plaza*
- ⑧ *Shared/Festival Street Plaza*
- ⑨ *Reconfigured Plaza Entry to Joe Martin Stadium*
- ⑩ *Civic Promenade*
- ⑪ *Stormwater Green Streets*
- ⑫ *Playground*
- ⑬ *New Community Recreation Center with Expanded Aquatics*
- ⑭ *Downer Baseball/Softball Field Improvements*
- ⑮ *Gateway Roundabout*
- ⑯ *Site for future recreational or other development, pending formal agreement with Bellingham Public Schools for land purchase and sale*



Fraser St.

Puget St.

Moore St.

Civic Field Way

Potter St.

Carl Cozler Elementary School

Orleans St.

Puget St.

Lakeway Drive



Community Recreation and Aquatic Centers as South End Anchors

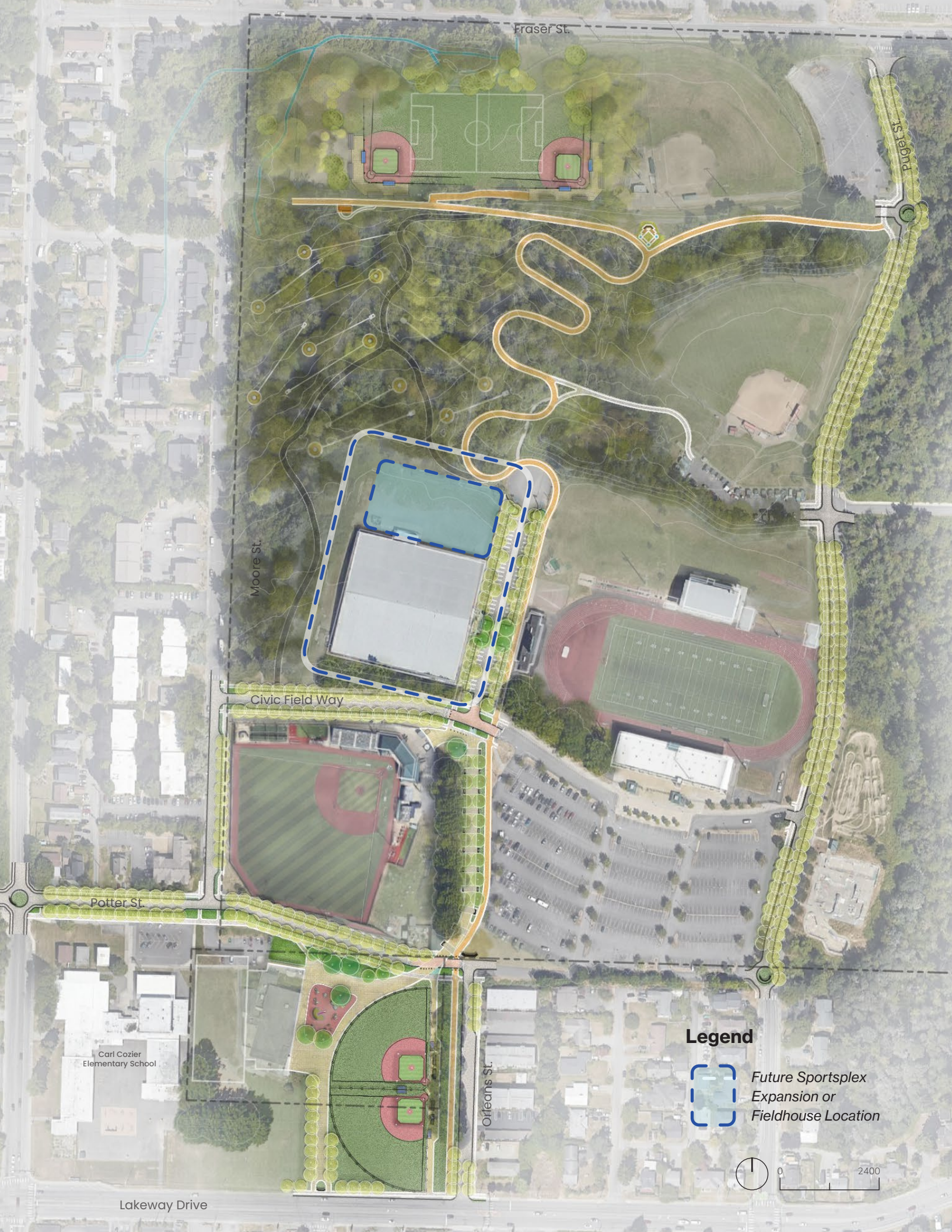
At the southern edge of the site, along Lakeway Drive, a new Community Recreation Center will integrate and complement the offerings at the existing Arne Hanna Aquatic Center to become a new community hub for indoor athletic and community uses.

A long-standing goal of various sports, recreation, and general park users, the Community Recreation Center would help activate this southern edge of the site. The Community Recreation Center is supported by the public as expressed in the recent Parks Recreation and Open Space Plans and in the 2022 Recreation Needs Assessments. To advance this investment, the City is currently conducting a market analysis of the potential for a Community Recreation Center, which exploring and testing the business case for additional indoor recreation, both at the recreation center and expanded Sportsplex (see next page).

When constructed, this new structure could transform this portion of the site, making it a new beloved community hub that activates the site and screens some of the unwanted air and noise pollution coming from both the busy Lakeway corridor and Interstate 5.

The Community Recreation Center still needs to be designed, but preliminary public feedback includes an extensive wishlist of aquatics program elements including a new/expanded pool (potentially indoor/outdoor), cold and warm water pools, a lazy river, kids water play area, water slides, a 50-meter pool, a diving well, a saltwater pool, hot tubs, and an audience area. Along with these aquatics uses, community members have also requested indoor spaces dedicated to other recreation amenities like free weights, workout equipment, training/sports medicine with an ice machine, a cafe, space for yoga, an indoor play space, an ice/hockey rink, a gymnasium for basketball and volleyball, courts for squash/racquetball, and indoor track, and a performing arts space. Through the design process of the Community Recreation Center, these potential program elements will be prioritized and assembled into a proposed investment package for this new building and community hub.

There may be additional land available at the southwest corner of the Complex – the current site of Carl Cozier Elementary School – that could be used for community recreation purposes or other community priorities yet to be determined. The availability and potential uses of this land depend first on the outcome of land sale and purchases being evaluated by the City and school district and secondly on the outcome of City analysis and community input on the size, scale and configuration of a future community recreation center.



Fraser St.

Puget St.

Moore St.

Civic Field Way

Potter St.

Carl Cozler
Elementary School

Orleans St.

Lakeway Drive

Legend

-  Future Sportsplex Expansion or Fieldhouse Location



Sportsplex and Indoor Recreation Amenities

In addition to the Community Recreation Center, the City-owned Sportsplex also serves as a hub for ice hockey, figure skating, community ice times, and indoor soccer. Users span all ages and competition levels, including community-based, private clubs, “pay to play” programs, and public access. The Sportsplex also hosts childcare, camps, and afterschool activities. The city anticipates that the facility will always be managed/operated by a third party lessee.

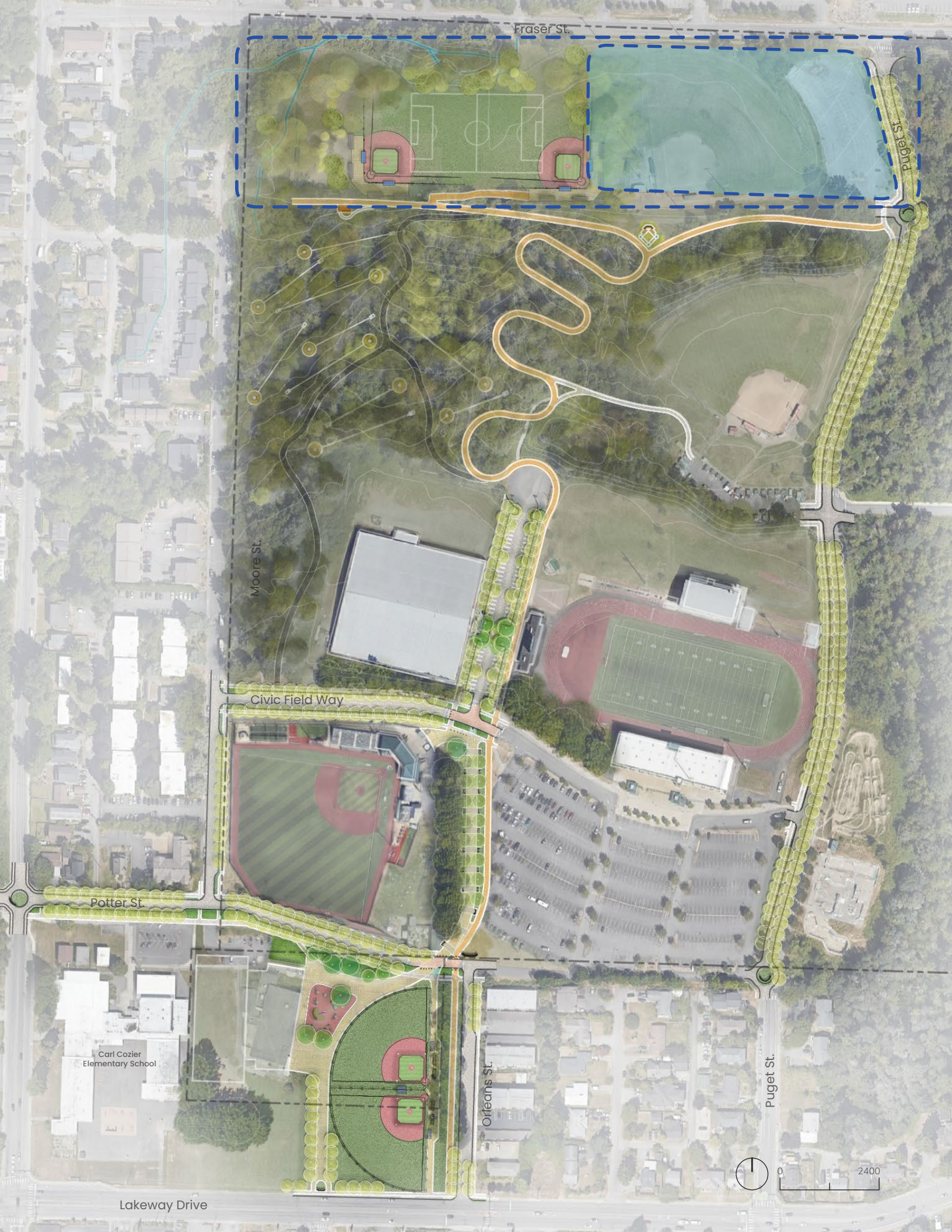
The indoor soccer and hockey communities have both shared that their needs are growing beyond what the current Sportsplex facilities can accommodate, and expansion desires include a possible second sheet of ice or a possible fieldhouse.

Recognizing those needs, the master plan reserves the land to the north of the Sportsplex for this future expansion in order to meet more of the community’s indoor recreational demand, essentially doubling the facility’s recreational capacity.

The building envelope, structural condition and exterior lighting remain the responsibility of the city. Interior maintenance, operations, improvements, and future expansions will be the responsibility of current and/or future operators and their community partners. There is also interest in electrifying the building and equipment to reduce climate impacts and operations costs, which are the responsibilities of the lessee and community partners.



The Sportsplex is actively used by athletic groups throughout the area.



Fraser St.

Puget St.

Moore St.

Civic Field Way

Potter St.

Carl Cozler
Elementary School

Orleans St.

Puget St.

Lakeway Drive





A view overlooking Geri Field #1 in the northeast corner of the CAC, which is a location identified as a potential site for the new elementary school placement.

Carl Cozier Elementary School Relocation and New Turf Playfields as North End Anchor

Through a collaborative community input process, the City and school district sought feedback from the school community, recreation groups, and the broader community about the best location for a new elementary school. The corner of Puget and Fraser Streets was identified as the preferred location.

Pending the outcome of the school district and City's evaluation of the possible relocation, a new school site could anchor the northwest corner of the Civic Athletic Complex. This reconfiguration could bring new energy to the area through new recreational and play amenities – shared for school and broader community use – as well as a new school, which is yet to be fully designed. To replace existing ballfields, the north end of the Complex would include two turfed and lit ballfields, a multiuse field shared across outfields, and the possibility for a wetland interpretive parklet where Lincoln and Moore Creeks braid together to create a wetland complex.

If the school district does not move forward with a relocated Carl Cozier in the near future, a full infield amendment and outfield restoration of the Geri fields will be needed to maintain these facilities' playability.



Fraser St.

11000

Puget St.

Moore St.

Civic Field Way

Potter St.

Carl Cozier
Elementary School

Orleans St.

Puget St.

Lakeway Drive



Civic Promenade

With significant civic destinations anchoring both the north and south ends of the park, the Civic Promenade provides the organizing structure to connect the Community Recreation Center, Sportsplex, and school as two significant pedestrian generators.

Starting from the south end of the site, where the Community Recreation Center is located, the civic promenade functions as a pedestrian corridor near the Community Recreation Center, and a shared use path along Orleans Street. At Potter Street, they come together and proceed northward either in tandem or overlapping as the adjacent intensity of uses necessitates. Along the way the promenade passes Joe Martin Stadium; new, lit, and turf Downer Baseball/Softball Field Improvements; a thrilling community playground; the Sportsplex; Civic Stadium; the forest; and Geri Fields. Each of these destinations radiate off of the promenade providing a clear way of navigating the site while also focusing pedestrian activity to the promenade as people travel to and from their destinations.

Between Potter Street and Civic Field Way, Orleans Street is closed to traffic, allowing only occasional vendor or maintenance vehicles to enter. This creates a car-free space to sit on benches to people watch or simply decompress under a high-branching canopy. Overhead lights complete the invitation to safely linger along the promenade and help to make Civic a place that all members of the community can access safely at any time of day. Along the west side of this portion of the promenade, a separated, all ages and abilities bike lane for people rolling through the site allows those users who are moving quicker to move through on a dedicated, safe travelway. Between the existing parking lot and this portion of the promenade is also a perfect location for secure bike parking for users to access.



At the Orleans/Civic Field Way intersection, Orleans' vehicular traffic returns to provide access to both a reconfigured parking lot in front of the Sportsplex and access to the large surface parking lot. The promenade, here, becomes a shared use path along the west side of Civic Field, with an intentional raised crossing connecting Civic Field's gatehouse entry with the adjacent Sportsplex.

Continuing north, the shared use path wraps around the cul-de-sac to begin its descent toward the north end of the site. This portion of the trail maintains a low, ADA accessible grade by switchbacking across the hillside. This sense of gracious meandering is made more comfortable for all users with overhead lighting and ecological plantings that promote clear sightlines. As the promenade reaches the north end of the site, users can turn toward the elementary school, cross Puget Street to enter the Salmon Woods Open Space's trails, or turn the opposite direction and head toward the wetland park overlook or to exit to Moore Street. The existing Baseball Hall of Fame memorial will be relocated to this trail divergence point, creating a small spot to linger.

(Opposite) A promenade in Nimes, France allows for people to connect with diverse user groups in a public forum.



Civic Woods

Throughout the master planning process, the community provided thoughtful and passionate feedback on the importance of the existing Civic Woods as a cherished community asset. The City's first priority in any discussion of these woods is to maintain and enhance the health of the canopy and understory.

To promote a safe environment and to discourage inappropriate uses that occasionally occur in the City's urban forests, Parks continues to look for ways to add positive activation without negatively impacting the natural infrastructure. Walking trails, exercise stations, and a disc golf course were all suggested as potential enhancements to the forest that the City may want to consider in the future. If any of these potential uses move forward, their design should prioritize the protection of the woods' canopy and understory.



Fraser St.

Puget St.

Moore St.

Civic Field Way

Potter St.

Carl Cozler
Elementary School

Orleans St.

Puget St.

Lakeway Drive

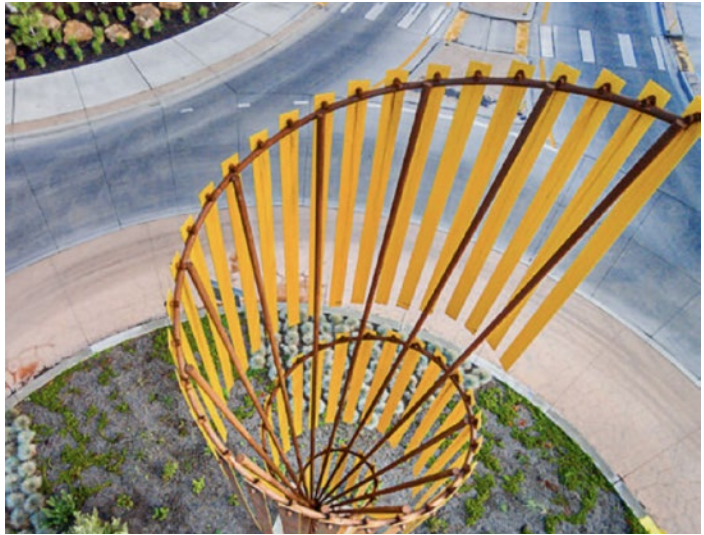


Roundabouts, Roadways, Green Infrastructure and Site-wide Parking

To enhance the sense that the Civic Athletic Campus is both a part of and distinct from the surrounding city, the Master Plan rethinks existing circulation systems to emphasize a unique campus identity that distinguishes it from the city to encourage sustainable, climate-friendly practices; support active transportation; maintain accessibility; provide loading and unloading; and encourage exploration on foot, consistent with the City's climate goals.

At several entry points to the Civic Athletic Campus, new roundabouts mark the transitions from the hectic cityscape to a relaxing, rejuvenating park landscape. These circular roundabouts are imagined with central rain gardens, helping to establish the ethos of the park as a place where recreation and ecological stewardship co-exist in proximity to Whatcom Creek. Within these native-planted rain gardens, large scale entry signage and wayfinding—constructed from bee houses to encourage pollinators—welcome visitors to the park, further enhancing the sense of arrival. At the intersection of Orleans and Potter Street, there is also wayfinding signage to orient users to parking and other destinations.

These roundabouts give way to a network of reconstructed park roads that present a more comfortable, verdant, and sustainable pedestrian realm than currently exists. (Note that the roads in Civic are not public rights of way, but are park access routes.) Often this means narrowing the amount of asphalt from broad, heat-absorbing expanses to right-sized, shaded cross sections.



*Roundabout art creates intriguing environments that help slow traffic and create a unique sense of place.
(image: visitbend.com)*

These new streetscapes now incorporate street trees and sidewalks to make them more human-scaled, walkable, and cool. Where space allows, new green stormwater infrastructure elements, like swales and rain gardens, help showcase forward-thinking stormwater management strategies, bringing the connection to the salmon-bearing creeks into the everyday experience of visitors. Recent studies have shown that these types of planted rain gardens help protect juvenile salmon from deadly chemicals that come from roadway runoff, making the connection to Whatcom Creek even more impactful.



Existing, over-scaled pedestrian condition on-site.

Along many of these restructured roads, parallel parking will line one or both sides of the street, providing parking for visitors and helping to slow and calm traffic. These stalls will be in addition to the existing parking lot, the parking near the Sportsplex, and the existing lot at Geri 4 which will remain untouched. In the on-going Community Recreation Center discussion, parking will also be considered, with an eye toward organizing loading/unloading,



*A rain garden integrated into the sidewalk and street in Bellingham.
(image: City of Bellingham)*

accessible parking stalls, and clarifying multimodal access for all users. Additionally, Bellingham Public Schools and Bellingham Parks are working to finalize a shared use agreement that will allow park users to access the school's parking lot during non-school hours to provide access to recreational amenities like the twin ballfields at the north end of the site.

As needs evolve, all of these parking facilities can be adapted to prioritize accessible parking for people with disabilities along with load and unload zones for athletes carrying heavy sport gear.

As discussed above, this Master Plan imagines the portion of Orleans between Potter and Civic Field Way to be car-free with only the occasional activation use (e.g. food trucks), load-in/load-out vehicles, and/or maintenance uses. Civic Field Way between the parking lot and Moore Street can also be used and adapted to function as a "festival street," making it easy to close with simple bollards to create an expansive plaza during track meets, large sporting events, concerts, and other significant gatherings.



Fraser St.

Puget St.

Moore St.

Civic Field Way

Er St.

Orleans St.

Lakeway Drive

Carl Cozler
Elementary School

Legend



Placemaking Opportunity



Pedestrian/Cyclist Wayfinding Opportunity



Vehicular Wayfinding Opportunity



Wayfinding and Placemaking

Throughout the campus, new wayfinding and placemaking opportunities abound. Vehicular and pedestrian orientation signage will help orient new users to the site and direct them toward various destinations. For the pedestrian signage, accessibility will be particularly important to consider so that all users can wayfind around the park, including Braille signage, annunciators, and tactile maps. Similarly, best practice accessibility measures like tactile warning strips and tactile directional bars can help users with limited sight and other disabilities navigate between various destinations.

With opportunities for public art, new murals, seasonal plantings, and event banners, the Civic Athletic Campus has a number of placemaking opportunities that can enhance its overall character. Partnerships with various civic groups and organizations may make these elements easier to implement. Similarly, seasonal lighting—even a light festival in collaboration with local arts organizations—can invite people to visit the campus even during “off” season.



Upgraded Facilities and Uses

While there are significant changes that will be implemented over time at the Civic Athletic Campus, there are also a number of elements on the campus that will retain much of their look and feel. These include:

- Geri Field 4
- The throwing sports area
- Civic field and the track
- Civic stadium
- The dirt bike park
- The skatepark
- Joe Martin Stadium
- The existing forest

On the next page, we document these existing uses and users, and identify potential key upgrades that should be prioritized for implementation in the coming years.



The skate park and dirt bike track at the south east corner of the CAC will be preserved.



Fraser St.

Puget St.

EXISTING FOREST

GERI FIELD 4

THROWING SPORTS

CIVIC STADIUM, TRACK AND FIELD

JOE MARTIN STADIUM

DIRT BIKE TRACK

SKATE PARK

DOWNER FIELDS

Carl Cozier Elementary School

Orleans St.

Puget St.

Lakeway Drive



Civic Stadium Track and Field

The primary users and uses at Civic Stadium's Track and Field complex is the Bellingham School District Scholastic Sports High School and Football, track and field, Cross-Country, post-season soccer playoffs, Middle School Track. Collegiate Track and Field competitors and Rangers Soccer. In the coming years upgrades and major maintenance will include:

- Turf Replacement
- Scoreboard Upgrades
- Sound System and Speaker Upgrades
- Field Light Replacement
- Parking Lot and Concourse Light Replacement
- Field Goal Replacement
- Concession Area Improvements

Joe Martin Field

The primary users and uses at Joe Martin Field are youth, collegiate level, and adult baseball. Over the coming years, the following improvements have been identified:

- Expansion of event areas on Civic Field Way and Potter Street
- Concourse concrete leveling/replacement
- Press Box renovation
- Concession area Improvements
- Grandstand seating and infrastructure (concrete and rail) improvements
- Locker room and club house addition to facilitate use by additional user groups

Skatepark and Dirt Bike Track

These recreation elements are primarily used by their respective action sports communities. Future upgrades and investments in the facilities may include:

- Geotechnical stabilization investments to shore up the eroding slope
- Potential lighting investments

Geri Field 4

The primary users and uses for Geri Field 4 include youth baseball and adult softball. To continue to best serve the community, the following upgrades have been identified:

- Synthetic Turf -OR- Field Mix scraping and annual amendment
- Upgrade lights to LED in the next 10 years
- Landscaping improvements
- Dugout/Scoring table/Bleacher replacement
- Possibly improve to turf surfacing
- If turf, then provide year-round restrooms

Geri Fields 1, 2, and 3

If Carl Cozier Elementary remains on Lakeway, Geri Fields 1, 2, and 3 will require improvements. Geri Fields 1, 2 and 3 have similar uses and users as Geri 4. If Geri Fields 1, 2 or 3 are replaced by other facilities, then improvements will be required at Squalicum Creek Park to meet recreation demand. Improvements at Squalicum may include:

- Synthetic Turf -OR- Field Mix scraping and annual amendment
- Lighting for Squalicum Field 3

Downer Fields

The primary users and uses at Downer Fields include youth baseball and soccer leagues. To facilitate play by these users, the following upgrades and policies should be considered:

- As placeholder until fields are fully replaced, replace dugout/ backstop/bleachers
- Provide netting for backstop
- Install Infield mix amendment
- Consider multi-use field options and playground
- Field would be dedicated for youth softball facilities



Fraser St.

Puget St.

Moore St.

Civic Field Way

Potter St.

Orleans St.

Lakeway Drive

Possible School Site

Carl Cozler Elementary School

Legend



Building sustainability opportunity



Site/stormwater sustainability opportunity



0 2400

Sustainability

Throughout the site, there are opportunities to express Bellingham's deeply-held commitment to sustainability. Above we discussed the ways that green stormwater infrastructure can be integrated into the roundabouts, parking lots, and streetscapes, which may be the most visible expression of sustainability, but is not the only one. As each facility redevelops, the site's existing stormwater management infrastructure will be upgraded to better protect streams and salmon in the area.

With the buildings, there are new opportunities for climate-friendly design that arise including energy efficiency upgrades, green energy production, and nature friendly design. The facades and landscapes can integrate bird and bat nesting boxes, as well as native bee habitat to promote the role of pollinators in the community. On the buildings themselves, achieving green building targets like LEED, PassiveHouse, or Living Building standards can help ensure that the high aspirations for the community around sustainability are met. These may reveal opportunities for solar panels, solar heating, water reuse, heat exchange, and geothermal energy use.



A bee habitat integrates into the art in this urban space





An artist's rendering depicts what the future promenade might look when viewed looking south from the intersection of Civic Field Way and Orleans Street. Joe Martin Stadium can be seen on the right, and the existing parking lot can be seen on the left.

PRESERVATION

Conserves habitat and open space, enhances native species and creates opportunities to learn about and interact with nature.

CONNECTION

Supports community connection through enhanced trail corridors protecting wildlife habitat and improving physical, mental and emotional health.

PLAY

Inspires imagination and joy.

EQUITY

Quality and quantity of amenities equally distributed, easy to safely use year-round and accessible by all modes of travel.

RESILIENCY

Stewards a long-term park system that helps reduce the impact of climate change and supports flexible spaces that accommodate traditional, emerging and future recreational use.

INCLUSIVITY

Responsive to the entire Bellingham community: all ages, abilities, languages, genders, cultures and income levels.



During the November 2024 open house, the community provided feedback on four options (above). The Consortium participants used agreed-upon values to guide the decision-making process (left).

Process

The master planning work began in 2022 when the city engaged a consultant team to lead a comprehensive assessment and evaluation of the existing facilities and infrastructure at the Civic Athletic Complex. The results of that study can be found in Appendix A. This work revealed which sites were constrained by various pre-existing encumbrances and which facilities would soon need upgrades, providing a baseline for the City to make decisions about the site's future. This work also established critical area boundaries to understand how the natural systems at the site were working, revealing a number of wetlands.

The process of developing the Civic Athletic Campus' Master Plan was deeply collaborative, engaging public and stakeholder input over the course of about nine months.

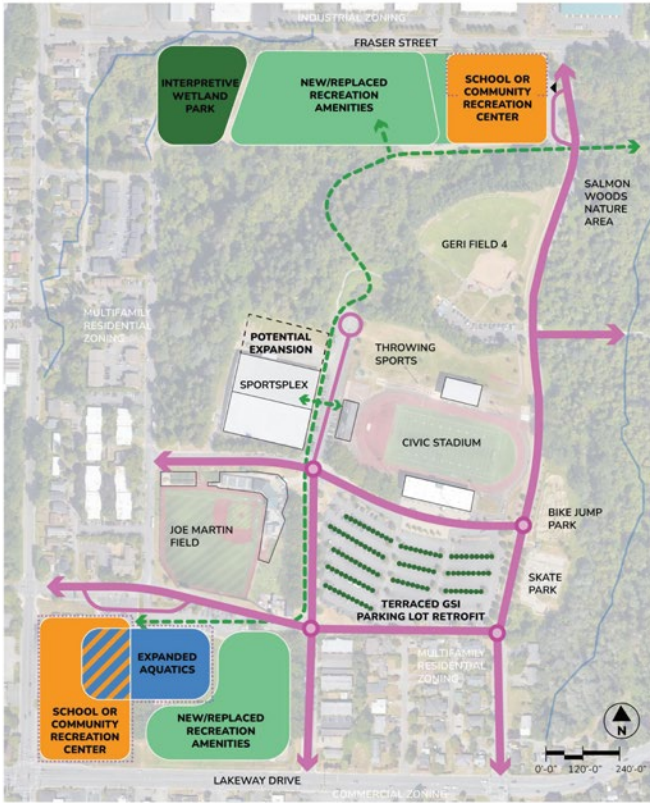
In evaluating a new location for an elementary school and new or expanded recreational amenities, BPS and the City of Bellingham sought feedback to test community support for the idea and the locations of new facilities. City Parks and Recreation staff worked in close collaboration with a group of "superusers" of the site - existing recreational and school sports stakeholders, as well as school district and Carl Cozier stakeholders. This consortium of superusers (including groups and individuals listed in this report), met over the course of the input process to provide their perspective on future development.

The City also hosted one in-person public open house, as well as an online survey, recorded presentation, and Engage Bellingham feedback site to solicit input from the broader public.

Over the next several months, the City of Bellingham hosted three consortium meetings and one, in-person public open house. In addition to these in-person events, an online survey, Bellingham Public Television broadcast, and several news items were produced that further extended the project's reach and impact.

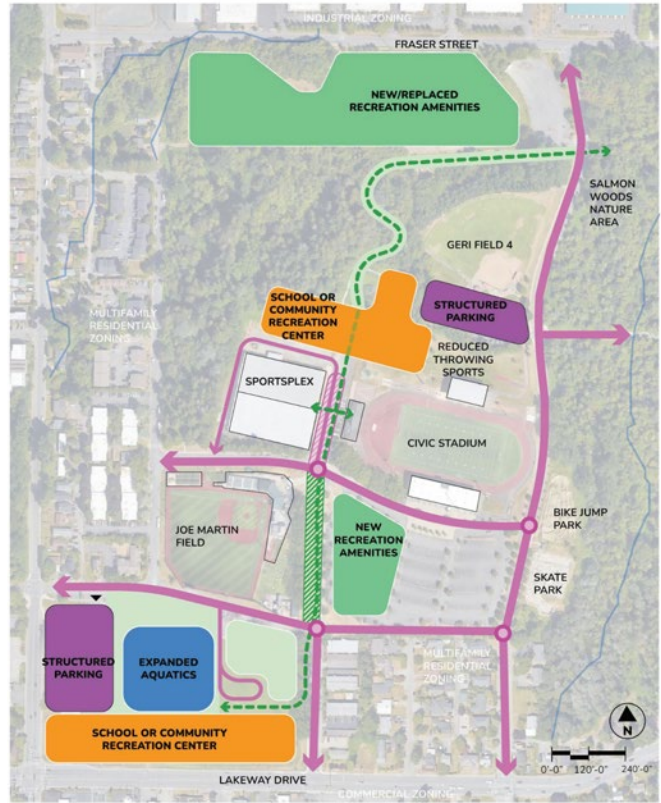
OPTION 1

FRAMING THE PARK PERIMETER



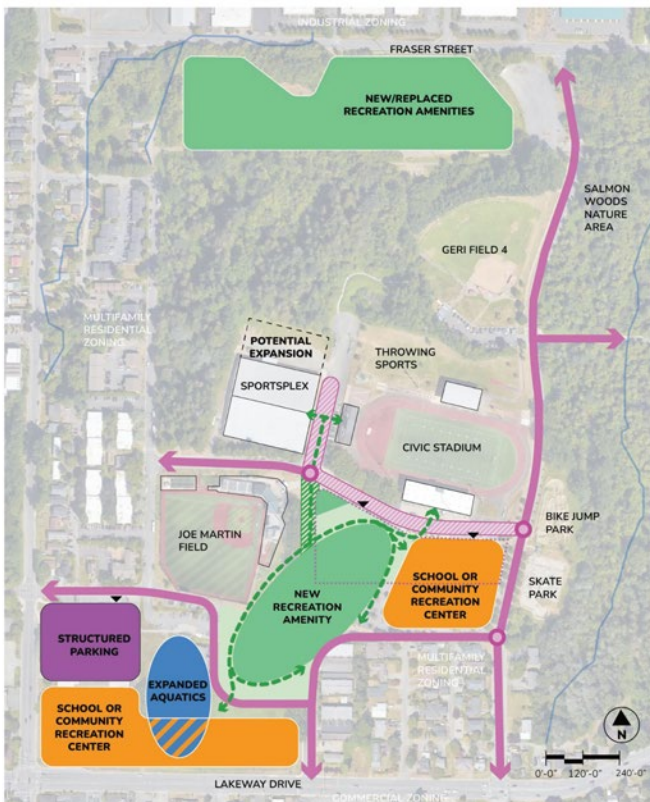
OPTION 2

COMMUNITY CENTERED



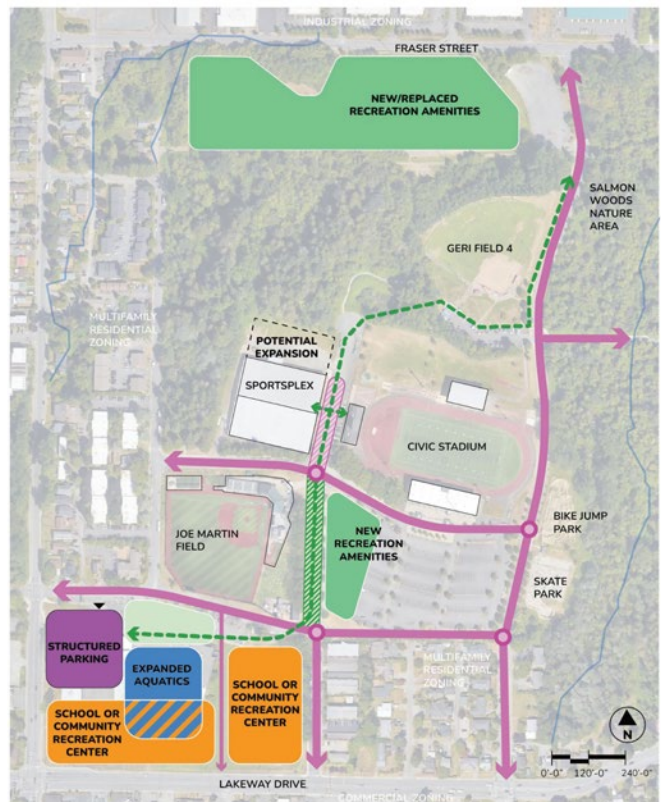
OPTION 3

THE CONNECTED CAMPUS



OPTION 4

THE LAKEWAY HUB



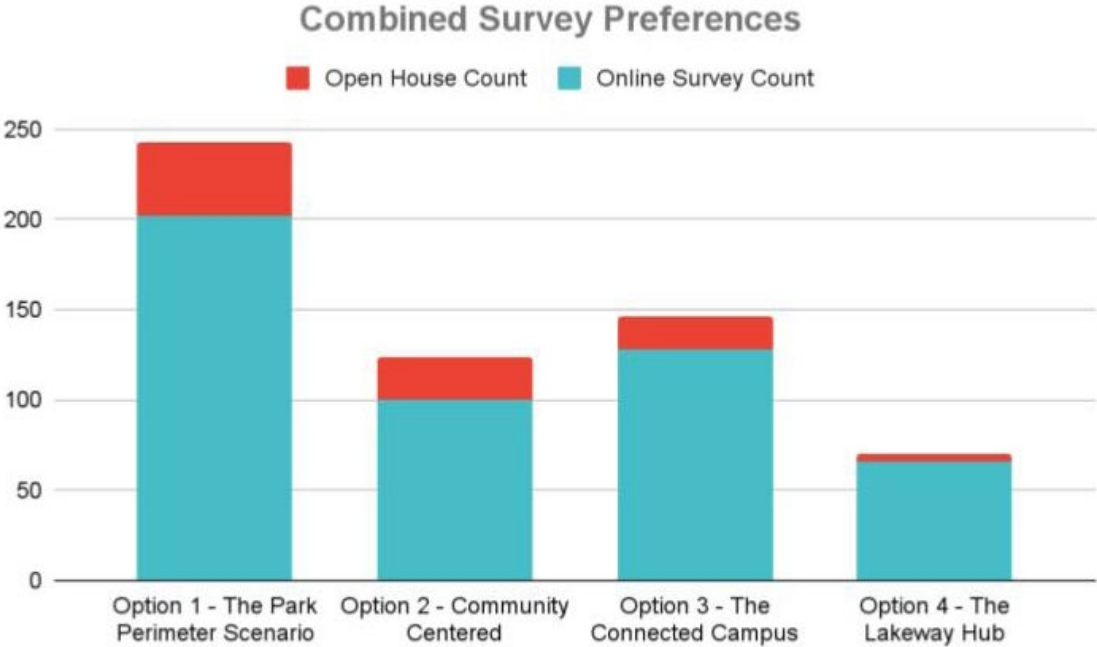
During the first Consortium meeting in early October 2024, the stakeholders reviewed and vetted project goals and aspirations as well as the values that would guide the decision-making process. The project team introduced Consortium members to the facility assessment work that had been done to date and considered the implications for what could and could not be done with regards to development at the site.

At the end of October 2024, Bellingham Parks and Recreation hosted the second Consortium meeting. During this meeting, the project team presented several preliminary, “bubble-diagram” approaches to how the site might be redeveloped, and then consortium members split into breakout groups to evaluate the tradeoffs presented by each of these options and to check them against the stated decision-making values of the community. The consortium members’ review provided critical insights that helped the project team to refine these ideas before bringing them forward to the public at the upcoming open house.

In November 2024, Bellingham Parks and Recreation hosted a well-attended public open house at Bloedel Donovan Park. Over one hundred community members took in the existing site analysis and research, along with four options for how the site could be configured. The presentation of these ideas was recorded by Bellingham Public Television and later broadcast on the station. Additionally, the City distributed an online survey to participants and consortium members to share with their networks and to offer feedback if they were unable to attend the in-person event. For approximately 2 weeks, over 1,000 community members offered their feedback on the different options.



WHAT THE COMMUNITY TOLD US



Public feedback survey results in response to the four presented options.

In the end, the public returned a clear direction in choosing the master planning configuration that pushed the two largest footprint facilities—the relocated Carl Cozier Elementary School and the Community Recreation Center—to the north and south perimeter of the site (see survey responses above). The school community preferred the quiet of Fraser Street compared to the busy southwest corner of the site. Community center users appreciated the ability to build some connections between the community center and Arne Hanna Aquatic Center while also anchoring and shielding the rest of the site from a busy street corner.

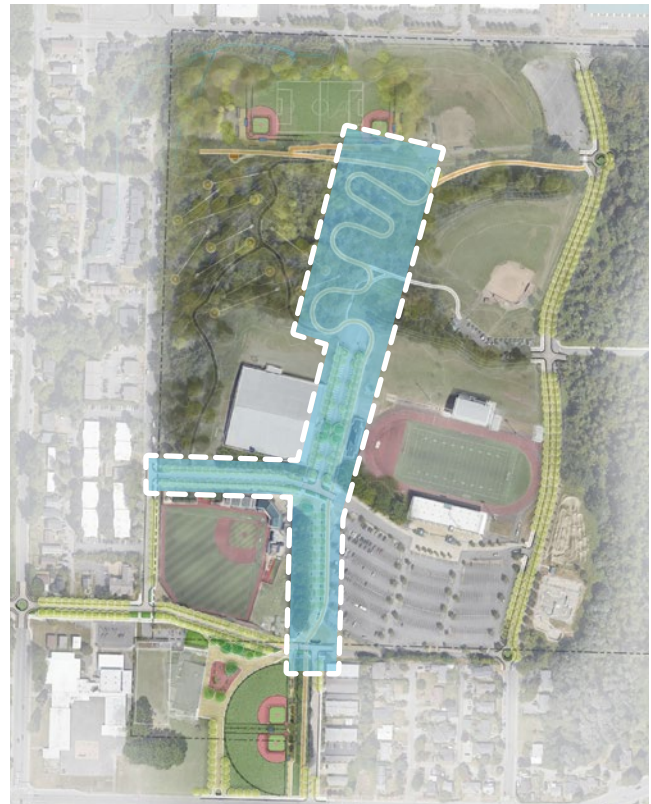
In addition to these “big moves,” members of the public also provided more discrete, site specific and nuanced feedback. Taking in all of this information, the city and the design team came back to the Consortium in December of 2024 to propose a written description of the preferred Master Plan based upon this extensive public feedback. With the consortium’s assent, the design team then created the plan that is illustrated in this document and that was presented to the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board (PRAB) in June of 2025.



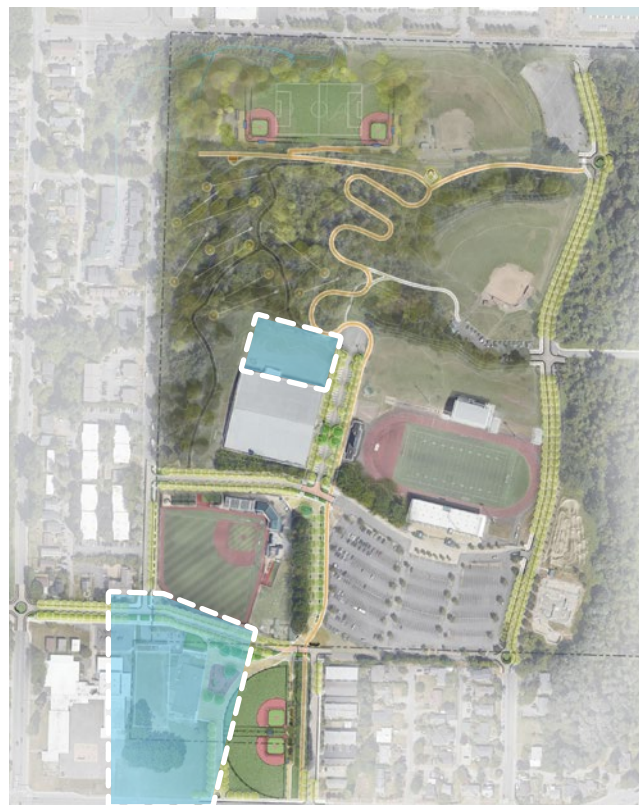




Phase 1: Make planned improvements to the recreational and potential development sites at the north end of the Complex and improve the playability of Downer Fields.



Phase 2: Construct the Civic Promenade and associated infrastructure so that the entire campus is effectively knit together, thus amplifying the impact of future investments.



Phase 3: Construct the indoor community recreation uses, including a potential Sportsplex expansion/field house and the Community Recreation Center.

Implementation

The master plan is intentionally opportunistic in its implementation, meaning that there is not a critical first step that needs to be done, but rather a series of singular projects that can be woven together to craft a cohesive whole. Throughout the master planning process, members of the public impressed upon staff and the project team the desire to implement significant portions of this Master Plan quickly so that momentum was not lost.

Some of the projects will be implemented with already identified partners. For example, Bellingham Public Schools will lead the design for the new Carl Cozier Elementary School. While undergoing design and construction, the current Carl Cozier Elementary will remain in service. The school may be used after the new school is completed; Bellingham Public Schools could use it as a “swing school” space while another elementary school is constructed.

With existing resources, including a Washington State Department of Commerce grant, the City is also currently advancing planning for the new Community Recreation Center. This work will help identify the final program elements, square footages and arrangements of the community recreation center so that decision makers have a clear understanding of project costs and the funding opportunities.

For other facilities, no design or costing has been completed beyond what is in this report. Some level of design due diligence should be conducted to turn the various projects identified in this Master Plan into discrete fundable projects. The CAC project team has suggested one potential strategic approach to phasing, as shown opposite.



When it comes time to develop the funding approach for these improvements, there are a number of potential sources at both local, state and national levels for the City to consider. These include:

- Direct appropriations through local, state and national bodies
- Multiple funding sources including Greenway mission-aligned projects
- Competitive grant funding through the state Recreation and Conservation Office
- Department of Ecology stormwater grants to retrofit stormwater infrastructure and parking facilities at the site
- Real Estate Excise Tax (REET) income
- Park impact fees
- Private philanthropy
- Corporate sponsorships
- Booster sponsorships/support

With the diversity of improvements at Civic, the City should be opportunistic and strategic about leveraging these funding resources to advance implementation at the site.

In addition to these measures, the project team has also discussed leveraging some of the unique conditions of the site to create a larger capital infusion including:

- **Paid Parking at the Site.** As the city has learned from past large events, even a modest parking fee can help reduce demand for surface parking at the site and promote the use of active transportation measures. This has the potential dual benefit of advancing the city's stated climate and mode split goals while also generate dedicated user fees that can be reinvested into continual upkeep and improvements at the Civic Athletic Complex. If implemented and once proven, the city may also explore whether it can bond against this parking income stream, amplifying the capital available in the short to medium term.
- **Excess Land at Lincoln and Lakeway.** Through the community recreation center planning process that is just beginning, the City will have a better sense of how much of the land between Lincoln and Orleans, Lakeway and Potter will be required for this new, substantial addition. If the entire area is not needed, the City may want to consider a partnership either in the form of a land sale, yielding a one-time cash infusion, or a ground lease, which establishes a long-term, steady income stream.

Given that in both of the examples above, community members would perceive a diminishment of park assets and/or services in some ways, our recommendation is to keep any funding realized through these new income streams as dedicated to park improvements and upkeep within the Civic Athletic Campus, offering a demonstrable nexus of public funding and public improvements.

RMC ARCHITECTS

MxM LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE