

40th Street project - fencing

As part of a Transportation Fund project, the sidewalk along 40th Street has been extended to the edge of a vacant City parcel – which impacted adjacent wetlands. As a direct result, City action is required to maintain water quality, habitat and the hydrologic watershed functions by protecting and improving the parcel's wetlands. Crews are planting native plants to help improve wetlands on the parcel and will soon install additional fencing to prevent use as an unsanctioned park.

Regarding public use of this vacant City parcel: while the parcel has been used by neighbors as a shortcut trail or dog park, the property is not a designated park. The property was purchased to support transportation needs, including the need for wetland mitigation. Even though the space is vacant and tempting to use, it is important to protect it in order to improve watershed health. In addition, the City has a responsibility to protect streams and wetlands on the parcel.

FAQ:

We were told there would be no fencing – why did that change?

We realize that some neighbors heard there would be limited fencing and that public use of the parcel as an unsanctioned park could continue. Construction of the project includes permits that require enhancing and protecting wetlands on the vacant parcel. In order to meet the long-term permit requirements, the site wetlands need to be protected and additional fencing has been deemed necessary. While protecting and enhancing site wetlands are permit requirements, it is also the right thing to do for overall watershed health. The City will install a split-rail fence and signage to provide permanent protection. In the short term, to protect newly planted vegetation from deer, tall mesh fencing will be in place. That should help ensure the vegetation grows sufficiently to provide some stream and wetland protection from deer.

If extending the sidewalk on the 40th Street project triggered wetlands protection, why do it?

The corner of that parcel is a square turn, creating a nearly blind corner. Without a sidewalk, pedestrians are forced into the street where they could be at risk of being struck by drivers who don't see them in time.

How long will the fencing be there?

The tall mesh fencing is temporary; it will be removed as soon as the plants are sturdy enough to survive without maintenance. The additional split rail fencing, along the outer perimeter of the property, is to protect the site from human and pet encroachment and will remain in place. Whether or not there is a physical deterrent in place, the City parcel will not be available as pass-through trail or a dog park or other similar purpose.

What is so special about wetlands, why do they require protection?

Wetlands are common throughout Bellingham due to specific soil types and abundant hydrology. Wetlands occur in meadows and forests, or around open water, including estuaries. They are found in forests and in fields; even the smallest wetland provides some ecological function. Wetlands support ecosystems in many ways, including reducing the impact of floodwaters as well as providing wildlife habitat, and mitigating pollutants and excess nutrients.

Is there someplace else nearby where we can safely walk with our dogs or small children?

- Ridgemont Park, located in the Samish Neighborhood at 810 38th Street, is less than a half mile away and offers a basketball court, benches, playground, and picnic table. It is southwest of the 40th street parcel.

- Neighborhood connector trails can be accessed north of Dumas Ave. and between Jerome and Milton Streets.
- Additionally, the City's 2020 Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan includes a future east-west trail connection from the end of Dumas Ave. to the City's Samish Crest Open Space trail network.
- A complete guide map to the City's Parks, Trails & Natural Areas can be accessed online here: https://cob.org/wp-content/uploads/Parks_Trails_Natural_Areas_March-2019.pdf.