



THE BELLINGHAM PLAN

PHASE 2 SUMMARY REPORT

OCTOBER 2024

We have been listening to your feedback to shape the direction of the Bellingham Plan. Building on the community conversations and feedback started in 2023, Phase 2 community engagement sought to gain deeper insight into the vision and direction from Phase 1 – all of which will inform the goals, policies, and implementation direction of the Plan. This brief presents the key insights and themes we heard, highlights the main takeaways, and presents the questions that will help us refine our next steps.

Your input is crucial as we move forward, ensuring the plan reflects the unique needs and hopes of everyone in Bellingham. Thank you for being with us along the way!

WHAT IS THE BELLINGHAM PLAN?

The Bellingham Plan is the City's Comprehensive Plan that addresses important topics, such as housing, transportation, and climate resilience, which will guide development, capital investments, city programs, and other actions for the next 20 years.

THE COMMUNITY ENVISIONS A FUTURE WHERE

Bellingham's recreation, healthy environment, and public open spaces continue to be our strength.

Housing affordability is in alignment with local wages.

Transit connects our Urban Villages with frequent service.

People have safe options for getting around, especially on foot or by bike.

Cultural differences are celebrated and seen as a strength in the community.

We have gained enough housing, making it easier to find options that suit everyone's needs.

Housing growth is balanced with trees, nature, and greenery to ensure both thrive.

All areas of the city need to be part of equitable change.

People feel connected to their community and have many opportunities to gather.

A healthy mix of businesses and job opportunities are supported.

The community integrates consideration for climate change into our habits and choices.

Human-scale streetscapes make it pleasant to get around the city.

Neighborhoods across the city have choices for everyone, with a variety of housing types and places to gather and shop nearby.

Utilities and services have expanded to meet our growth.

People of all ages feel supported, especially seniors and youth.

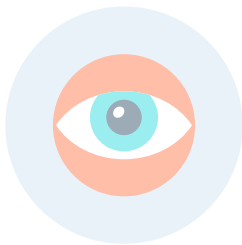
WHY IS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IMPORTANT IN THIS PHASE?

In Phase 1, we introduced the Bellingham Plan and asked the community their vision of Bellingham in 20 years and what they saw as barriers and opportunities for inclusive, equitable, and sustainable growth. Much of the conversation revealed or reinforced the presence of barriers to accessing housing, economic mobility, and a well-connected, safe, and accessible transportation network. While much of the gathered community feedback focused on a wide range of concerns and priorities, the Phase 2 process was intentionally designed to:

1. *Answer some of the central questions* around how and where growth can occur for a sustainable and equitable Bellingham for all;
2. *Educate the community* about the recent state legislation driving the big changes that are coming;
3. *Discuss questions* about how the City could plan for both community needs and those new requirements.

This feedback is then used to inform updates to each topic's goals and policies as well as the Future Land Use Map, the foundational guidance for growth in the City, for a truly community-centered plan.

PROJECT ENGAGEMENT + TIMELINE



2023

Phase 1
**VISION &
FOUNDATION**

Project awareness +
relationship building

Broad engagement:
Visioning + Values

Listening sessions

Identification of
conflicting issues



2024

Phase 2
**GROWTH
APPROACH**

Focuses engagement on
identified issues

Round table discussions

Public open houses

Growth approach
comparisons

Focus of report



Phase 3
**DRAFT
REVIEW**

Review of draft language

Public open houses

Board & Commission
feedback



2025

Phase 4
**LEGISLATIVE
ADOPTION**

Public comment

Planning Commission
recommendation

City Council adoption

METHODS + TOOLS

Phase 2 aimed to expand participation by including a wide range of voices and perspectives on issues that individuals wanted to speak on. Phase 2 built on the methods and strategies from Phase 1 with a series of topic specific community-wide open houses, tabling, presentations at existing gatherings around the city, and community forums through the Bellingham Plan Engagement Hub. There was also focused community outreach to community groups that have historically been underrepresented in planning processes.



12 IN-PERSON EVENTS



743 CUMULATIVE
EVENT ATTENDEES



131 ONLINE VIEWS OF
THE BELLINGHAM PLAN
VIDEO



3230 RESPONSES
GROWTH SURVEY

Phase 2 Online Engagement
(From January 1 through July 31):



435 “ENGAGED”
PARTICIPANTS (ANSWERED
A SURVEY/TOOL PROMPT)



697 “INFORMED”
PARTICIPANTS (CLICKED
AROUND A BIT)



3199 “AWARE”
PARTICIPANTS
(VISITED THE SITE)





PLANNING FOR HOUSING

Housing was a consistent focus of many participants throughout the engagement process, reflecting its importance to the community. Participants in this round of engagement agreed that Bellingham should be a place that has opportunities for everyone. Whether starting a career, pursuing education, raising a family, or exploring the natural and local environment, the Bellingham Plan needs to be representative of the diverse people and interests in Bellingham. The community's housing choices should align with the needs and wages of the community.

"What do I want? Affordable housing! Basic, clean 2-bedroom, 1.5 bathroom places with parking ... I want to be able to buy a house and not worry about [my rent going] up every year when my income doesn't keep pace."

INTRODUCING MORE OPTIONS AND SUPPLY

The Bellingham Plan should not only implement state legislation through clear guidance, but reflect the evolving needs of Bellingham residents and those that want to live in in the city. We need to clarify the types of housing allowed, where they are located, what they look like, and how they contribute to a well-functioning city. Barriers to housing development should be reduced, especially for affordable projects and those that meet other critical community needs.



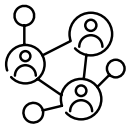


PLANNING FOR PEOPLE

Many participants agreed that the policies and programs that are recommended by the Bellingham Plan have to provide equitable and inclusive access to resources, amenities, homes, and jobs that are necessary to sustain a high quality of life. Members of our immigrant community may need support or guidance to access community services due to a language barrier. Seniors may depend on accessible public spaces and health services, and families may prioritize safe parks and childcare options. By recognizing these varying needs, we can assure our diverse community feels welcomed, valued, and supported.

INCREASING RESILIENCY AND EQUITY ACROSS THE PLAN

The community expressed a desire for greater focus on resilience and equity in Bellingham's future and a need for these priorities to be integrated into every chapter of the Bellingham Plan. There was a specific call for more gathering places and opportunities to bring people together to learn, celebrate, and empower each other.



PLANNING FOR SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

The community supported investing in housing that meets growth demands while balancing Bellingham's unique charm. There was a desire for urban villages, mixed-use neighborhoods with diverse housing options, and small-scale commercial spaces across the city. Residents prioritized expanding middle housing in areas that are walkable, bike-friendly, and near frequent transit stops to create a more connected city.

"Incorporate better, more accessible public transit... more tree canopy, less pollution by car and emissions, crosswalks and pedestrian friendly accommodations."

EMBRACING SUSTAINABLE, TRANSIT-FOCUSED PLANNING IN FUTURE GROWTH

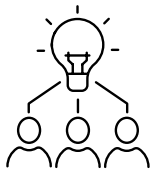
While this is not a new approach for the Bellingham Plan, the community affirmed the need for a well-connected city with sustainable multi-modal alternatives and transit-oriented infrastructure available for everyone. The community saw a direct connection between a well-connected community and City investments in mixed-use areas. These include existing and new Urban Villages as well as transit corridors that connect them.

PLANNING FOR CLIMATE CHANGE



Bellingham cares about climate change. Individuals want to do their part, but they see the City as a leader in shifting toward a more sustainable and resilient future. We need to continue reducing our greenhouse gas emissions through smart policy choices, but we also need to ensure that we are ready for long-term climate changes and anticipated climate events.





BUILD OUR FUTURE TOGETHER

The community welcomed the opportunity to engage and share their input on Bellingham's future. Participants expressed interest in staying informed and involved, with a strong desire to ensure everyone's voice is heard, especially those who have not been included before or may not know how to participate. Residents asked for more accessible ways to share their ideas and contribute to decisions that impact their future. This means making planning materials clearer, simpler, and easier for everyone to understand.

"What makes us Bellingham? Thoughtful community engagement."

APPROACHABLE PLAN STRUCTURE

One of the City's top priorities is to engage the community and prioritize outreach from start to finish. To ensure equitable engagement, we heard that it is critical for the Bellingham Plan to be accessible and usable for everyone, not just those with special interest and knowledge. New chapters that focus on climate and community are necessary to ensure that the City is addressing current issues and protecting future generations.

HOW YOUR VOICE WILL SHAPE THE PLAN



Thank you to all for sharing your thoughtful insights with us. Your feedback will be used to inform the development of policies and updates to the Future Land Use Map.



MOVING FORWARD: PHASE 3 NEXT STEPS

In Phase 3, the focus will be on drafting the Bellingham Plan and incorporating the feedback and input collected from the community during Phases 1 and 2. Phase 3 includes several key steps:

1



Staff will prepare the initial draft of the Bellingham Plan, integrating community feedback to shape policies and recommendations.

2



The community will be invited to review the draft, attend public open houses, and provide feedback as we collect additional community input.

3



The Planning Commission followed by City Council will provide feedback on the Bellingham Plan draft as it goes through adoption.

To learn more visit engagebellingham.org.

A SPECIAL THANK YOU TO OUR PHASE 2 COMMUNITY PARTNERS