



THE BELLINGHAM PLAN



THE BELLINGHAM PLAN PHASE 3 SUMMARY REPORT JANUARY 2025

Over the past few months, we have been building on the foundation laid in Phases 1 and 2 to shape the future of Bellingham through the Comprehensive Plan (“The Bellingham Plan”). In this phase, we presented the draft materials to the public for feedback. This included a summary document and outlines for each chapter, which were all informed by State Requirements and community feedback. We provided opportunities for input both online and at in-person open houses.

THANK YOU TO ALL WHO PARTICIPATED!

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.

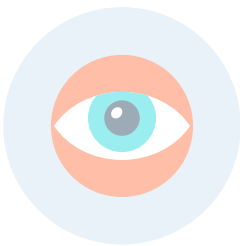


WHY IS THIS PHASE IMPORTANT?

Phases 1 and 2 deepened public understanding about the planning process and identified and delved into key topics like housing security, economic growth, and multi-modal transportation.

This phase, Phase 3, brought together the results and feedback from Phases 1 and 2 into draft plan materials and gathered community feedback. This provided community members an opportunity to identify gaps, refine content, and discuss potential improvements to ensure alignment with State Requirements and community needs and aspirations.

PHASE 1 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



Phase 3 DRAFT REVIEW

- Review of draft language
- Public open houses
- Planning Commission feedback



2025

Phase 4 LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

- Board and Commission Discussion
- Public comment
- Planning Commission recommendation
- City Council adoption


Focus of report


METHODS + TOOLS

A summary of key changes to the existing Comprehensive Plan and draft outlines of each chapter were central to Phase 3 engagement. These were provided both digitally and presented in-person. This phase ran from August 15 through December 17.

ONLINE PARTICIPATION

(via City of Bellingham Website)

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2,484
Aware Participants
(visited the project page or content)
- 

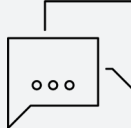
326
Informed Participants
(engaged with detailed content)
- 

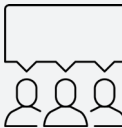
152
Engaged Participants
(provided comments or input)

IN-PERSON OPEN HOUSES

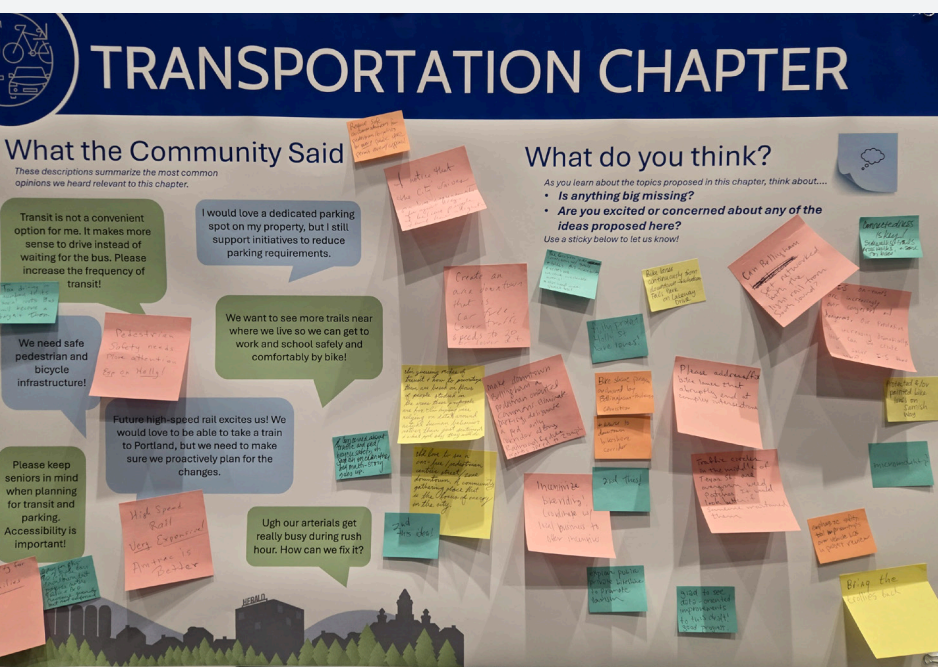
Three open houses were held to encourage participation:

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Western Washington University (WWU)
November 14, Midday: 81 sign-ins (students and community members)
- 

Options High School
November 14, Evening: 57 sign-ins
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Cordata Park
November 20, Evening: 50 sign-ins



COMMUNITY FEEDBACK ON THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The community shared insightful feedback on draft material for the Comprehensive Plan throughout the outreach process. There was clear support for most of the updates we're proposing for Bellingham's growth plan, especially related to reducing barriers to more housing development and options, supporting human-scale streetscapes, allowing more small-scale commercial uses, and addressing inequities.

See the most significant updates we're proposing for Bellingham's growth plan in our [Summary of Proposed Updates](#).

Beyond support for the changes we proposed during phase 3, here is the most common community feedback we received:

BELLINGHAM FOR ALL

- Interest in more direct discussions about homelessness
- Desire for more emphasis of and support for the arts
- Concerns that accessibility needs to be emphasized more
- Emphasis of importance of Tribal relations being addressed in the plan
- Support for determining targeted employment sectors

MORE HOUSING CHOICE

- Desire to continue seeing a variety of unique areas of the city, even as housing types expand
- Concern that housing is being treated solely as an investment (e.g. short-term rentals, large management companies)
- Desire for creative redevelopment of existing areas of the city with more housing
- Interest in providing more feedback as design standards are updated

SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

- General support for expanding the city boundary to the north to provide more housing, but mixed support and opposition to expanding to the south
- Concerns about sprawl, inefficient infrastructure, and lost environment if the city expands
- Notes that our infrastructure is aging, and we need to keep up with it as we grow
- Calls for more public access to the waterfront and urban integration of environmental features

CLIMATE RESILIENCE

- Strong emphasis of climate as a key part of growth strategy
- Interest in more emergency and severe weather planning
- Desire for a stronger emphasis on providing more transit options

NEXT STEPS

Phase 4 (Adoption) will commence in February, focusing on draft material discussion and adoption through the following activities:



Planning Commission Meetings: A series of discussions will preface a recommendation for City Council adoption in Fall 2025, with opportunities for public comment there and through additional board and commission meetings.



Chapter Reviews: Draft chapters will be released in groups for public feedback, which will be shared with the Planning Commission during their discussions.



Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Chapter Updates: Public engagement in Spring 2025, led by the Parks Department, will shape the chapter, which will be adopted as part of the Comprehensive Plan.



Housing Regulation Updates: Parallel with Bellingham Plan adoption efforts, staff will begin aligning development regulations with new state housing laws, with a separate, but related public engagement process.



To learn more visit engagebellingham.org.

A SPECIAL THANK YOU TO OUR PHASE 3 COMMUNITY PARTNERS