

The Bellingham Plan: Bellingham's Comprehensive Plan for Growth

The following document provides essential information, including introductory narrative and the full list of goals and policies, for the Bellingham Plan as adopted on December 15, 2025 (Ord 2025-12-039). Please contact theBellinghamPlan@cob.org if you have any questions.

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Introduction

The Bellingham Plan is for everyone and helps shape our vision for the future.

This plan provides a vision for our future built through intentional collaboration between City of Bellingham staff and the community. We lay out high-level goals for our city and identify ways to work toward them, continuing today's successes while identifying new work to move Bellingham forward.

Acknowledgments

The following City decision-makers took part in the thoughtful discussion, review, recommendation, and adoption of the 2025 update to the Bellingham Plan.

Mayor: Kim Lund | City Council: Lisa Anderson, Jace Cotton, Daniel Hammill, Hollie Huthman, Michael Lillquist, Hannah Stone, Edwin H. "Skip" Williams | Planning Commission: Jed Ballew, Daniel Bloemker, Mike Estes, Scott Jones*, Rose Lathrop, Lisa Marx, Barbara Plaskett*, Jerry Richmond, Russell Whidbee

*Term concluded prior to plan recommendation and adoption

The following City boards and commissions also provided integral feedback and suggestions throughout the update process.

Arts Commission, Community Development Advisory Board, Design Review Board, Greenways Advisory Committee, Historic Preservation Commission, Immigration Advisory Board, Mayor's Neighborhood Advisory Commission, Parks and Recreation Advisory Board, Tourism Commission, Transportation Commission

A wide-ranging interdepartmental team of City staff, led by the Planning and Community Development Department, collaborated to develop the 2025 update to the Bellingham Plan. Nearly every City department played an integral role in this process.

A variety of other local and state agencies provided assistance or feedback throughout the process as well.

Members of the Community Work Group, those who participated in focus groups on a variety of topics, and many other local organizations provided critical feedback throughout the process that helped shape the final plan.

Thank you to the many community members and organizations who took part in the engagement process to help shape the 2025 Bellingham Plan.

Our Guide to Growth

Bellingham is growing, and this comprehensive plan – The Bellingham Plan – will guide how our city grows over the next 20 years. We are planning intentionally for more housing, jobs, and services that will make the Bellingham of the future a place where everyone can thrive.

To that end, this plan sets goals for critical topics, such as housing, transportation, climate resilience, and community wellbeing, and establishes policies that keep us on track to achieve our vision.

Woven throughout the plan are several key and interconnected topics that reflect the community we want to be.

Key & Interconnected topics

Investing in a network of vibrant urban villages that are connected by well-designed transit corridors with mobility options for all: cars, bikes, buses and pedestrians.

- Fostering complete neighborhoods with housing, services, activities, and more nearby.
- Supporting more housing development in a range of types and costs to meet everyone's needs.
- Planning inclusively and equitably across the city, with everyone's interests in mind.
- Planning for compact growth and urban services that can be sustained into the future.
- Balancing urban growth priorities and environmental stewardship.
- Prioritizing access to parks and nature across the city.
- Adapting to a changing climate with resiliency while continuing to reduce greenhouse gas emissions
- Ensuring a mix of commercial, institutional, and industrial uses while working with partners to support a strong local economy.
- Fostering strong community and civic connections, where everyone feels safe, included, and connected as part of the community.
- Doing our part to create conditions that promote health and wellbeing.

Together, the chapters, goals and policies on the following pages reflect these concepts, forming the governing framework that represents the community's plan for the future. They guide development, capital investments, City programs, and other actions across Bellingham as we collectively work toward our vision for 2045.

Comprehensive Planning requirements

What is a Comprehensive Plan?

The Growth Management Act (GMA) was passed by the Washington State Legislature in 1990. The GMA was enacted in response to rapid population growth and concerns about suburban sprawl, environmental protection, quality of life, and other issues. It requires cities and counties of a certain size to develop a comprehensive plan.

Comprehensive plans, like the Bellingham Plan, are used by communities to establish a vision for the future and provide a framework for building towards that vision. The Bellingham Plan looks forward 20 years and provides goals and policies for development, capital investments, City programs and other implementation actions. It is updated significantly every ten years in a “periodic update” that is required by a defined GMA schedule. This last took place in 2023-2025 for the 2025 Periodic Update.

Comprehensive plans must include the following objectives:

- Urban Growth - Encourage development in urban areas.
- Reduce Sprawl - Reduce the inappropriate conversion of undeveloped land.
- Transportation - Encourage efficient multimodal transportation systems.
- Housing - Plan for and accommodate housing affordable to all incomes.
- Economic Development - Encourage economic development.
- Property Rights - Ensure that private property is not taken for public use without just compensation.
- Permits - Applications should be processed in a predictable and timely manner.
- Natural Resource Industries - Maintain and enhance natural resource-based industries.
- Open Space & Recreation - Retain open space, enhance recreational opportunities.
- Environment - Protect the environment and enhance the state’s high quality of life, including air and water quality, and the availability of water.
- Community Participation & Coordination - Encourage the involvement of all community members.
- Public Facilities & Services - Ensure that public facilities and services can support development.
- Historic Preservation - Identify and encourage preservation.
- Climate Change & Resiliency - Ensure that comprehensive plans, development regulations, and regional policies, plans, and strategies adapt to and mitigate the effects of a changing climate.
- Shoreline Management - Manage shorelines through an adopted program.

2025 Comprehensive plan engagement

Community engagement is a critical part of the periodic update process. Between 2023 and 2025 the City actively engaged with the community to understand current values and concerns, as well as hopes for the future. The engagement process also helped inform the public of any changes to state law, local regulations, and new proposed concepts in the plan. Additional information about this engagement is available under the Data and Resources section of the Comprehensive Plan website.

Thousands of residents, students, workers and visitors shaped the Bellingham Plan. Engagement took many forms including open houses, presentations, surveys, a community workgroup, focus groups, tabling at community events and more. The community feedback was invaluable, and the City is grateful for all those that participated.

- 8,992 Survey Responses
 - 4,287 Community Vision Responses
 - 1,475 Housing Preference Responses
 - 3,230 Growth Responses
- 14 Open Houses: 980+ total participants
- 750+ Engaged Online: 9,880+ site visits
- 11 Community Workgroup Meetings
- 3 Spanish-speaking Focus Group Meetings
- 20+ Presentations and Community Outreach Events

Engagement in Action

Community engagement is factored into the development of the Comprehensive Plan, which in turn influences actions that are taken as a result of its adoption. These actions may be more detailed City action plans as well.

Comments heard during Bellingham Plan engagement don't lead to immediate change, but they support the plan's identification of priorities and goals. Later work on implementation also integrates engagement, but these decisions focus more on specific actions rather than overarching priorities.

- Community Priorities
 - Public engagement helps determine community priorities. Patterns emerge through community conversations and feedback channels.
 - For Example: Significant comments saying "We want to feel safer biking to work and school!"

- Plan Goals & Policies
 - Community priorities influence goals and policies in the Comprehensive Plan.
 - For Example: The Bellingham Plan goals and policies
 - Goal: Provide a transportation system that prioritizes safety, comfort, and reliability for all ages and abilities.
 - Policy: Develop pedestrian and bicycle facilities that minimize interactions with vehicular traffic, ensuring safe and comfortable routes for users of all ages and abilities.
- Plan Implementation
 - Goals and policies get implemented through City plans and decisions.
 - For Example: The Bicycle Master Plan calls for many specific improvements that get implemented over time, such as the James Street Bike Comfort Improvements.

Land Use

As Bellingham grows, we need to plan ahead to ensure new homes, businesses and public spaces can meet our needs.

To do this, the City establishes rules and incentives to guide construction and improvements. They define how land in different areas can be used. This chapter provides a map and policies to guide what is allowed, encouraged or discouraged in different areas of the city. Together, these define a vision for what growth and changes Bellingham should see in the coming decades.

City Documents Adopted Herein

These references are adopted as part of the Bellingham Plan, requiring the same process for updates as the plan itself.

- Urban Village Plans: Each of these plans provides a vision for an urban village, including detailed policies and facilities needs.
 - [Downtown Bellingham](#)
 - [Waterfront District](#)
 - [Fairhaven](#)
 - [Fountain District](#)
 - [Samish Way](#)
 - [Old Town](#)
 - [Barkley](#)
- Institutional Master Plans: Each IMP includes a vision for the future of that campus as well as standards and requirements to guide development.
 - [Western Washington University](#)
 - [St. Joseph's Hospital \(North Campus\)](#)
 - [Whatcom Community College](#)

LU-A Limit urban sprawl, encouraging sustainable growth in urban areas and clustering it in compact, walkable and transitable areas while protecting the community's natural resources.

LU-1 Provide sufficient land area and densities to meet Bellingham's projected needs for housing, employment and public facilities. Plan to accommodate a total population of 135,829 people, 66,109 housing units and 89,768 jobs in the City of Bellingham and its unincorporated Urban Growth Area (UGA) by 2045.

LU-2 Support high-density and mixed commercial/residential development in the City's urban villages and along high capacity transit corridors connecting the urban villages, allowing people to work, shop and recreate near where they live.

LU-3 Encourage and support development near amenities like parks and schools and in areas where adequate public facilities and services exist, maximizing use of existing and future infrastructure and services and allowing preservation of other natural areas.

LU-4 Encourage design flexibility (e.g. clustering) to preserve existing site features, including trees, wetlands, streams, natural topography and similar features.

LU-5 Consider potential wildfire spread impacts and mitigation opportunities when planning land use regulatory changes or significant public projects within the Wildland-Urban Interface.

LU-6 Encourage the assembly and redevelopment of underdeveloped parcels through incentives and public/private partnerships.

LU-7 Incentivize residential development in proximity to and mixed with commercial development, especially in areas that lack significant residential development.

LU-8 Minimize development and its impacts to water quality within the Lake Whatcom Watershed.

LU-9 Coordinate with Whatcom County and other appropriate agencies to intentionally discourage development in rural areas outside cities and unincorporated UGAs, sustainably directing growth to urban areas.

LU-10 Work with the county and constituent cities to implement a regional growth strategy that preserves land outside the unincorporated UGA for long-term agricultural use and recreation and preserves a network of open space corridors, green space, community forests, wildlife habitat and critical areas, including between Ferndale and Bellingham UGAs.

LU-B Manage the long-term needs of the community through effective and sustainable planning of the urban growth area (UGA) and the annexation process.

LU-11 Utilize and periodically update an annexation plan that includes for each area of the UGA and UGA Reserve:

1. Identification and assignment of future land use and zoning designations for that area, considering long-term community needs;
2. Analysis of the costs of annexing that area and potential ways to cover or mitigate those costs, including but not limited to:

- a) Fiscal impacts of providing urban facilities and services such as police, fire, water and sewer, which may include phased level of service standards; and
- b) Impacts to the environment; and

3. Examination of the opportunities and priorities for annexing that area (e.g. providing needed land uses, infrastructure, revenue or other benefits to the city) in relation to the costs.

LU-12 Retain or add to the UGA or UGA reserve areas that have the ability to provide urban levels of development with land uses that fulfill an identified need, applying those urban land use designations upon annexation.

LU-13 Collaborate with Whatcom County and applicable school or utility districts to identify areas for addition to the UGA or UGA Reserve, discourage rural development in the UGA and UGA Reserve and develop a transition strategy for annexation of those areas.

LU-14 Work with Whatcom County to apply the City's infrastructure improvement standards and environmental regulations in the City's unincorporated UGA.

LU-15 Establish and maintain a periodic collaboration with the City of Ferndale to intentionally plan future annexations or UGA and open space corridor changes within the areas between Bellingham and Ferndale.

LU-16 Only consider annexations of land in Bellingham's unincorporated UGA when the analysis required in the annexation plan is complete for that area and includes a financially sustainable approach to provide urban facilities and services.

LU-C Foster vibrant urban villages.

LU-17 Encourage well-developed, pedestrian-oriented and vibrant mixed-use urban villages with good access to infrastructure, transit and other public facilities and services. Support a mix of employment opportunities, variety of new housing, and recreational opportunities in these areas.

LU-18 Continue to encourage compact urban village development with minimum development requirements, transportation fee reductions or other requirements and incentives.

LU-19 Develop and periodically update master plans to reflect the unique nature of each urban village. Include flexibility for a healthy mix of land uses, clear and objective design standards, support for multi-modal transportation options, sustainable development practices and supportive public amenities.

LU-20 Provide flexible and effective incentives for development in the planned urban villages to provide income-restricted Affordable housing, public open space and other needed public benefits.

LU-21 Establish benchmarks and annual monitoring of key indicators for urban villages to assess the effectiveness of incentives and implementation progress.

LU-22 In instances where a proponent controls multiple properties within an existing urban village and seeks to coordinate infrastructure, collaborate in the development of plans, approaches and agreements, including development agreements.

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.

LU-24 Periodically review community needs, identifying potential future urban villages or smaller mixed-use nodes needed to address gaps in access to housing, commercial uses or amenities, such as in the northernmost part of the city.

LU-D Encourage growth in proximity to transit service and support increased transit service as areas grow.

LU-25 Collaborate with Whatcom Transportation Authority (WTA) to identify important transit corridors connecting urban villages, transit centers and other key locations such as those identified in the Transit Connections figure, including both existing and new frequent transit routes in which to invest further.

LU-26 Identify transit-oriented development opportunities throughout the city, integrating them into the transit corridor network as shown in the Transit Corridor Planning figure and fostering pedestrian-oriented design and mixed-use development.

LU-27 Develop integrated transportation-land use plans along the identified transit corridors. Include consideration for the following in tandem rather than individually:

- a mix of land uses and higher densities within each corridor that support increased transit use;
- design standards that enhance the pedestrian experience and support the multi-modal nature of the corridors;
- more frequent transit service; and
- when provided, appropriate parking design and quantity.

LU-28 In areas outside urban villages and their connecting transit corridors, collaborate with WTA to:

- periodically update transit service to meet shifting development trends; and
- identify long-term opportunities and investments in existing transit routes prior to considering significant land use changes along them.

LU-29 Discourage auto-oriented strip commercial development. Where such areas already exist, discourage linear expansion.

LU-30 Identify opportunities and encourage action to redevelop auto-oriented commercial areas into more compact, pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use nodes of activity, especially along transit routes.

LU-E Ensure a mix of land uses across the city with capacity to meet future community and economic needs.

LU-31 Regularly monitor land use capacity, especially during rezone discussions, to assess the available supply, adequacy and serviceability of developable land for residential, commercial and industrial land uses as it compares to the city's anticipated needs.

LU-32 Utilize consistent citywide approaches to manage land use regulations and planning processes.

LU-33 Utilize the Residential Watershed designation to permit a limited range of small-scale housing types at a low density level to limit development and water quality impacts within the Lake Whatcom Watershed.

LU-34 Utilize the Residential Low designation to permit a range of small-scale housing types and densities to achieve the city's housing diversity and affordability goals. Allow accessory, public and semi-public and limited small-scale commercial uses as well. Require development within this designation to meet minimum density standards.

LU-35 Utilize the Residential Medium designation to permit a range of mid-scale housing types and densities to meet the city's housing needs. Permit an expanded range of uses from the Residential Low designation, including limited office, and neighborhood commercial uses. Require development within this designation to meet a higher minimum density than that required within the Residential Low designation.

LU-36 Utilize the Residential High designation to permit the same range of uses as the Residential Medium designation while requiring development within this designation to meet a higher minimum density.

LU-37 Utilize the Residential TOD designation during the transit corridor planning process to require areas that are serviced by frequent transit to support higher concentrations of people and services.

LU-38 The Commercial designation includes a range of commercial development intensities, from small neighborhood commercial areas to large planned commercial and mixed-use center areas. In general, commercial areas should provide and encourage a broad range and mix of services, commercial uses, residential uses and personal service establishments.

LU-39 Utilize the Public designation to define parcels of land that are owned or leased by public agencies such as city, county and state governments and the Bellingham School District. Certain public uses may be located in other zoning districts as designated in the Bellingham Municipal Code. Public zoning is used for a range of uses, including parks, recreational facilities, trails, open space, schools, utilities and other local governmental facilities. Limited commercial uses are permitted when appropriately located to activate public spaces.

LU-40 Utilize the Institutional designation in areas containing public or quasi-public institutional uses requiring large land area that benefit from comprehensive and coordinated planning efforts. These large institutional public or quasi-public campus-type developments currently include Western Washington University (WWU), Whatcom Community College (WCC) and St. Joseph Medical Center.

LU-41 Utilize the Industrial designation to provide land for a range of potential uses, including light and heavy industrial uses and in some industrial zones, commercial uses.

LU-42 Ensure that the supply of industrial zoned land supports local and regional needs, particularly by reserving existing industrial zoned land in the city and UGA for industrial uses and appropriate accessory uses.

LU-43 Separate heavy industrial uses from incompatible land uses such as housing or schools. Use transition zoning, buffers and other techniques to protect industrial areas and nearby uses from conflicts.

LU-44 In all zones where housing is permitted, permit transitional, supportive and emergency housing with regular or consistent occupants through a low-barrier process.

LU-45 Encourage the provision of emergency shelters and other emergency housing forms with irregular or inconsistent occupants, providing a clear and easily navigable process for locating them in any zone in scale with similar residential development.

LU-46 Promote a wide distribution of, and access to, human services by encouraging these uses, especially in areas with good access to transit, employment, education and services, at scales similar to other office and commercial activities.

LU-47 Coordinate land use regulations for areas adjacent to the Bellingham International Airport in order to:

- limit uses that could be impacted by airplane noise;
- discourage uses that could create (e.g. height hazards) or be impacted by airplane accidents; and
- ensure consistency with the Airport's Master Plan and applicable airport compatibility regulations.

LU-F Promote neighborhood resilience and vibrancy through the support and development of neighborhoods complete with a mix of housing, gathering spaces, essential goods and services and more.

LU-48 Encourage the provision of public open spaces, art, childcare and other public amenities within development projects across the city.

LU-49 Seek out publicly or privately managed opportunities to activate public spaces like plazas and parks with public-oriented commercial uses such as food purveyors or cultural events.

LU-50 Promote small-scale commercial uses (e.g. corner stores) within neighborhoods to encourage walkability and provide opportunities for employment and placemaking.

LU-51 Within Residential zones, limit the size of each commercial space and ensure the overall building scale and design is similar to that allowed for residential buildings in the area.

LU-52 Consider impacts to neighbors, such as noise, night-time activity and parking, when governing the operations of commercial uses in Residential zones.

LU-53 Allow more flexibility in commercial and residential scale and building types along arterials and near frequent transit stops, Urban Villages and other amenities, including in small-scale predominantly residential areas.

LU-54 Actively track and participate in efforts by the State Building Code Council to consider allowances for alternative and new building practices.

LU-55 Evaluate opportunities for flexibility to maintain and improve nonconforming buildings and uses that contribute to Bellingham's sense of place, identity and history as valuable assets to the community.

Housing

Bellingham needs a variety of housing to meet the range of needs of current and future residents.

Housing cost in Bellingham has increased significantly. Ensuring we have housing that meets the needs and incomes of residents continues to be one of the biggest challenges facing the city. Everyone has different needs, such as a certain number of bedrooms or access to a particular job. The City does not construct housing but does define the regulations that result in specific housing types, design styles, neighborhood configurations and more.

City documents adopted herein

These references are adopted as part of the Bellingham Plan, requiring the same process for updates as the plan itself.

- [Consolidated Plan](#): Assessing and planning for community development needs, including housing

References

These references are not adopted as part of this plan and may be updated periodically.

- [Assessment of Fair Housing](#)

H-A Ensure that Bellingham has a sufficient quantity of housing units and densities to accommodate projected growth.

H-1 Remove barriers to housing creation and preservation by periodically reviewing existing and proposed development regulations and policies for potential impacts on citywide housing capacity, development patterns, affordability and diversity.

H-2 Reduce the City's direct impacts on housing costs by periodically reviewing and updating the permitting, infrastructure improvement, City fee, and other processes for opportunities to reduce cost barriers when fiscally sustainable.

H-3 Encourage preservation of existing housing and the construction of new housing as appropriate to increase housing availability and work towards a healthy vacancy rate.

H-4 Track the prevalence of empty residential investment properties, vacation homes, and short term rentals that are not available to the residential rental or ownership market. If this reveals a significant impact to the availability of housing in Bellingham, explore opportunities to discourage such empty homes.

H-5 Periodically evaluate local development regulations to remove barriers to a variety of state-enabled construction types such as mass timber, six-story wood-frame construction, and single stairway residential buildings.

H-6 Encourage well-designed infill housing development throughout the city, especially near amenities like transit, jobs, parks, or services.

H-7 Consider opportunities for flexibility in development standards for large-scale housing developments proposed to align with the City's growth strategy.

H-8 Encourage a variety of active uses at ground level of residential buildings. In most mixed-use areas, allow ground level uses such as live-work units, communal or recreational resident spaces, and collaborative work spaces.

H-9 Explore opportunities to remove barriers to the conversion of underutilized buildings to residential uses, including identification of and connection to federal or state programs for historic preservation, adaptive reuse, seismic upgrade, or other scenarios.

H-10 Explore creative solutions for creating permanent affordability and community wealth-building such as community land trusts, limited equity cooperatives, resident owned communities, and public development authorities.

H-B Foster a mix of housing in all neighborhoods that is affordable for all income levels.

H-11 Increase the supply of income-restricted Affordable rental and ownership housing in all neighborhoods, especially in areas with good access to transit, employment, education and services.

H-12 Regularly monitor the city's housing market and trends, including:

- Reporting on the city's housing affordability through housing price, cost burden, and other statistics;
- Identifying areas and populations vulnerable to economic, cultural and physical displacement; and
- Tracking out-migration trends, utilizing this information when making policy decisions.

H-13 Actively counter displacement of residents through actions such as supporting housing assistance programs, linking residents with programs, considering displacement

risk factors in policy choices, and preserving existing manufactured home parks and other naturally occurring affordable housing.

H-14 Consider transportation and parking costs and accessibility of services when planning for housing affordability.

H-15 Encourage the rehabilitation, relocation and reuse, rather than demolition, of existing housing, especially that which is considered naturally affordable.

H-16 Encourage income-restricted Affordable housing and mixed income residential buildings by providing incentives such as density bonuses, expedited permitting, multi-family tax exemption program and fee reductions.

H-17 Monitor the residential development economy for opportunities to develop a mandatory inclusionary affordability zoning program without significantly reducing overall housing production.

H-18 Strive to avoid segregation of housing opportunities by income level by regularly evaluating barriers to the production and just distribution of income-restricted Affordable housing across Bellingham, identifying ways to reduce or eliminate them.

H-19 Encourage the development of housing that is more affordable than current alternatives, such as modular construction, small units, co-living housing, and other opportunities to share amenities or space to reduce housing costs.

H-20 Support the development of safe and innovative housing and shelter solutions, such as tiny house villages, that enable a continuum of options between living unsheltered and in permanent housing.

H-21 Seek out opportunities to support and expand low- and extremely-low-income housing programs and public funding (e.g. the local Housing Levy, state and regional funding initiatives, and HUD entitlement funds).

H-22 Actively coordinate with public and private partners, community groups, and trade representatives in efforts to monitor, plan for, fund, and meet regional housing needs.

H-23 Consider the viability of incorporating income-restricted Affordable housing when planning public projects or capital facility improvements on surplus public and quasi-publicly owned land.

H-24 Proactively collaborate internally and externally to identify land opportunities for income-restricted affordable housing, emergency housing, or associated services.

H-25 Utilize City messaging and partnerships to provide information to residents, especially underserved populations, on affordable housing opportunities and first-time homeownership programs.

H-C Ensure that Bellingham has a sufficient variety of housing types to accommodate the needs of the entire community and promote other community goals.

H-26 Utilize development regulations, fee structures, and City messaging that represent the full housing continuum beyond single family and multifamily structures.

H-27 Encourage a mix of housing types in new development projects in all areas of the city.

H-28 Encourage middle-scale housing forms across the lower-density areas of the city outside the Lake Whatcom Watershed. These housing forms include small lot single-unit homes, Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs), cottages, multiplexes, common courtyards, townhomes, and co-living housing.

H-29 Ensure a continued supply of medium-sized housing units as options for households with children or other space needs and for those just entering the housing market by promoting development of two- to three-bedroom housing units and appropriate amenities in every neighborhood.

H-30 Encourage the construction, retrofit, and preservation of a range of housing options in every neighborhood and within individual development projects that meets the unique needs for seniors and people with disabilities, allowing them to remain in their community. These may include units without stairs, those meeting universal design or visitability standards, group homes or assisted living opportunities.

H-31 Encourage a variety of off-campus housing options that meet students' needs, are high quality, provide enough bedrooms and/or communal spaces to encourage shared and therefore lower expenses, and are near local institutions of higher education.

H-D Support service-enriched housing options across Bellingham

H-32 Continue to prioritize, partner towards, and support the development of permanent housing with appropriate on-site services across the city for people with challenges related to age, health, or disability and those who have experienced homelessness throughout the city and county.

H-33 Coordinate and support the provision of services addressing substance-abuse, behavioral health issues, and physical and intellectual disabilities, either on-site or near Affordable and emergency housing options. Ensure that these services are scaled alongside housing investments.

H-34 Maintain an inventory and expand the city's supply of emergency shelter beds, transitional housing, and other interim housing types, providing temporary service-enriched solutions while supporting a path towards permanent housing.

H-35 Promote an equitable distribution of all service-enriched housing, encouraging options in every neighborhood and especially near amenities like transit, jobs, parks, or other services.

H-36 Collaborate with Whatcom County and nearby cities to address regional disability and homelessness challenges, planning for appropriate service-enriched housing options throughout the region.

H-37 Support the public provision of factual, regularly disseminated information about homelessness.

H-E Support and encourage homeownership opportunities.

H-38 Promote middle-scale housing types, such as small-lot development, cottage housing, and townhomes, that can be sold on individual unit lots.

H-39 Explore opportunities to reduce costly impacts of ownership models for infill housing projects, such as utility connection costs.

H-40 Permit and encourage shared equity housing ownership options such as condominiums, cooperative living, and other co-living housing.

H-41 Support statewide and regional reductions of barriers to condoization of new and existing housing.

H-42 Support and encourage limited equity housing models, such as land trusts, to provide long-term affordable home ownership opportunities.

H-43 Support and promote anti-displacement opportunities, such as programs that either assist homeowners remaining in their homes or provide opportunities to transition rental units to resident ownership models.

H-44 Continue permitting new and encouraging preservation of existing manufactured homes.

H-F Promote safe, healthy, and livable housing across Bellingham.

H-45 Support fair and equal access to housing for all persons, regardless of race, religion, ethnic origin, age, household composition or size, disability, marital status, sexual orientation or economic circumstances.

H-46 Enforce the City's Rental Registration and Safety Inspection Program to ensure that rental housing units comply with life and fire safety standards and provide a safe place for tenants to live.

H-47 Ensure all residents have access to open space, either on site or in nearby public park space.

H-48 Periodically evaluate the impacts of development regulations on the livability of housing produced and consider amendments to balance regulation flexibility with better quality site and building design, improved usable space for residents, and other livability features.

H-49 Encourage clustering of housing and mixtures of housing types together to preserve natural resources and trees and consolidate open space.

Community Design

The public realm and the community's sense of place is shaped by thoughtful and intentional design.

This chapter reflects public values and focuses on how the city looks, feels and functions. It addresses the design of buildings, open spaces and landscapes, streetscapes and other physical features. These physical features define Bellingham's unique identity and set the stage for the community's image, economic vitality and daily life.

References

These references are not adopted as part of this plan and may be updated periodically.

- [Urban Village Design Guidelines](#)

CD-A Express community identity and sense of place across districts and neighborhoods through improvements to the appearance, function and design of new development, commercial centers, urban villages, transit corridors, streetscapes and the public realm.

CD-1 Create an attractive, walkable, urban environment within and between districts and neighborhoods that prioritizes safety, accessibility and connectivity over auto-centric design. Implement this through careful street design, site planning, architectural design, pedestrian amenities and other strategies that enhance the public realm.

CD-2 Strengthen and improve the urban form by promoting distinct, attractive and livable neighborhoods.

CD-3 Ensure that the design and development of urban villages and transit corridors convey a positive image of the city, contribute to its economic vitality and improve visual and physical transitions into adjacent neighborhoods. Establish flexible standards that support these objectives.

CD-4 Continue to implement individual urban village plans that contribute to their distinct identities; continue to evolve these plans in response to changing circumstances.

CD-5 Ensure that Bellingham's City Center (i.e. Downtown, Waterfront and Old Town) is unique, attractive and reflects Bellingham's history and natural setting. Recognize the generally larger bulk and mass of downtown buildings as a positive aspect of urban design.

CD-6 Acknowledge and promote community design as an evolving reflection of the community's diversity and makeup as they change over time.

CD-7 Support public and private investment in improved design quality of infrastructure and amenities in existing neighborhoods, particularly in underinvested areas.

CD-8 Establish appropriate transitions between commercial, industrial, mixed-use development and residential areas with different scales and intensities of development. Consider methods such as architectural techniques, creative landscaping, screening or transitional uses such as plazas, pedestrian-scale amenities and pedestrian-oriented commercial uses.

CD-9 Promote community identity through streetscape enhancements, building designs and treatments marking the primary entrances, or gateways, to and within the city.

CD-10 Foster placemaking by supporting unique design themes in building facades, public spaces, streetscapes and other built elements within the visual public realm to create a sense of place and inspire a greater sense of community pride and ownership.

CD-11 Encourage the incorporation of creativity, culture and public art features with new and existing development.

CD-B Promote streetscapes that enhance the economic vitality and overall visual quality of the city, support the circulation network and support pedestrian-scale streets and patterns of activity.

CD-12 Coordinate across City departments to provide well-connected, human-scale, accessible and complete street design that ensures greater pedestrian comfort and safety and more active modes of transportation while accommodating mobility, utilities, green infrastructure and design amenities.

CD-13 Adopt criteria for administrative authority to allow flexible right-of-way standards when appropriate.

CD-14 Prioritize streetscape design enhancements within the city's urban villages and other mixed-used centers, and along transit corridors and other thoroughfares with coordinated public and private improvements.

CD-15 Install, protect and maintain curbside street trees in the public right-of-way. Recognize their role in contributing to shade cover, public health, and community character.

CD-16 Require new and retrofitted sidewalks to be set back from the curb and designed to include curbside street trees. Where possible, install other physical buffers between the sidewalk and traffic such as landscaping, street furniture, Low Impact Development (LID) stormwater management techniques, separated bike lanes and on-street parking.

CD-17 Identify and prioritize high opportunity platted alleys for proactive improvement within urban villages and along transit corridors in order to maintain a pedestrian-oriented streetscape, facilitate infill development and activate alleys.

CD-18 Activate the streetscape where all commercial uses are permitted by encouraging and reducing barriers to activities such as sidewalk retail, outdoor dining and mobile food vending.

CD-C Provide a built environment of well-designed, pedestrian-friendly and community-oriented sites and buildings.

CD-19 Establish and maintain a predictable, clear and objective set of design standards and review processes for development.

CD-20 Explore the use of form-based codes, incentive zoning and similar regulatory means to implement the Bellingham Plan's goals and policies.

CD-21 Promote high-quality and economically feasible development that achieves desired intensities while also encouraging creativity and variety in building and site design across Bellingham.

CD-22 Ensure that development and design standards are adaptable to a variety of conditions to allow for diversity in building styles and accommodate infill development.

CD-23 Emphasize pedestrian-oriented design with street-oriented entries, windows and architectural and landscape features that add human-scale visual interest and complement building and site design.

CD-24 Use development and design standards to ensure that the design, proportion, rhythm, scale and massing of new development contributes positively to the quality of the surrounding corridor or neighborhood.

CD-25 Encourage the use of high-quality and durable materials, as well as innovative, low-impact and environmentally-friendly construction techniques and designs.

CD-26 Consider potential impacts on adjacent properties and surroundings when developing or updating standards. This may include impacts related to noise, lighting and glare, refuse and equipment screening, privacy, view corridors and solar access.

CD-27 Incorporate Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles into objective design and development standards.

CD-28 Encourage safe, accessible and secure bicycle parking while reducing the visual impacts of auto parking areas and garages on the urban form.

CD-29 Include alleys in the design of new developments, and use abutting alleys and private access easements for a site's vehicular access, unless impractical or environmentally constrained.

CD-30 Create and implement sign regulations that limit visual clutter, protect the public interest and enhance the city's appearance and safety. Achieve this with measures such as limiting billboards and pole signs, encouraging signs to be consolidated and complementary in scale and discouraging signs that are dominating or distracting to drivers.

CD-D Integrate and emphasize natural features and open space across the community and in the design of new development and redevelopment.

CD-31 Preserve, encourage and enhance open and green spaces as key elements of the community's character through parks, trails, trees, water features and other significant properties that provide public benefit.

CD-32 Encourage land uses that promote and allow public access to and along the marine shoreline, while protecting shoreline habitats and functions.

CD-33 Identify and strive to preserve scenic vistas of important natural features from public spaces such as the Cascade Mountains, Lake Whatcom, Bellingham Bay, Chuckanut Bay, the San Juan Islands and hills that provide the natural backdrop to the city.

CD-34 Require or incentivize the connection and linkage of parks, neighborhood greenways, trails, and open spaces in the design of new development and redevelopment projects.

CD-35 Encourage and provide incentives to create publicly-accessible neighborhood parks, plazas, green spaces and other open spaces of various sizes throughout the city, particularly within commercial areas, urban villages and transit corridors.

CD-36 Encourage the design of publicly-accessible spaces to integrate arts and culture and provide amenities and facilities such as seating, lighting, landscaping and connections to surrounding uses. Encourage activities in these spaces that contribute to a sense of security.

CD-37 Require the installation and maintenance of adequate landscaping throughout the city and in development projects, prohibiting invasive plant species and encouraging the use of native or climate-adaptive plant species whenever possible. Where feasible, preserve trees and mature vegetation.

CD-38 Consolidate landscaped areas to be large enough to balance the scale of development and functional enough for leisure and recreation. In denser development, allow open space requirements to be satisfied with innovative and flexible applications of landscaping - including green walls and roofs and more intense landscaping of smaller open spaces - to allow more efficient use of the land for buildings.

CD-39 Develop an implementation strategy that seeks to balance a healthy urban forest canopy with the growing demand for housing units. Consider flexible ways to promote tree management within a larger area or city scale when a development proposes significant housing opportunities.

CD-E Preserve Bellingham's heritage, authenticity, and diverse identities through the preservation of historic buildings, sites, landscapes and cultural resources.

CD-40 To aid in maintaining and improving the City's existing historic preservation program, create, implement, and continually update a citywide preservation plan or strategy that sets priorities and includes at a minimum: 1) a comprehensive historic resources inventory, 2) regulatory and financial incentives for preservation, restoration and adaptive reuse and 3) outreach and engagement strategies.

CD-41 Promote the many benefits of historic preservation beyond the aesthetic and expand historic preservation to embrace tangible and intangible cultural heritage and include a broader spectrum of places, under-represented communities, persons and experiences that have shaped our community.

CD-42 Protect significant archeological and cultural resources, especially those that pre-date colonization, from the adverse impacts of development or changing environmental conditions.

CD-43 Recognize the important role of Bellingham's industrial past and maritime heritage, including the role of the indigenous community.

CD-44 Encourage and assist historic districts to retain their unique identities and qualities as they grow and change, and promote context-sensitive design of new buildings in proximity to other historic buildings.

CD-45 Steward historic preservation by encouraging preservation, restoration or adaptation of buildings with significant historic elements prior to redevelopment.

CD-46 Incorporate features, such as interpretive signage, historic relics and other elements reflecting historic structures, sites and stories into parks, transportation or other civic projects.

Facilities and Services

A network of facilities and staff provide important services to the community.

The City of Bellingham, other public agencies and private organizations each play an important role. Together, they provide urban utilities, streets, parks, public safety, educational opportunities and more. Careful coordination ensures needed buildings, infrastructure and staffing are provided as the city grows and changes.

City documents adopted herein

These references are adopted as part of the Bellingham Plan, requiring the same process for updates as the plan itself.

- [Capital Facilities Plan](#): Identifying facilities inventory, funding sources, and major planned improvements
- [Water System Plan \(and Update\)](#): Sourcing, conserving, treating, and supplying water across the city
- [Comprehensive Sewer Plan](#): Planning for wastewater collection and treatment
- [Surface and Stormwater Comprehensive Plan](#): Providing a framework for addressing potential pollution in rain and snow melt flowing to our waterways
- [Bellingham Public Library Facilities Master Plan](#)

References

These references are not adopted as part of this plan and may be updated periodically.

- Bellingham Annexation Strategy: Summarizing urban growth areas, challenges, and potential annexation phasing

FS-A Plan for and deliver an equitable, safe, cost-effective, and reliable network of public facilities and services in alignment with the City's growth strategy.

FS-1 Support the expansion, maintenance, and upgrading of adequate capital facilities and services to meet the primary service needs of the city as its population grows, recognizing regional needs, resources, and goals.

FS-2 Explore ways to utilize innovative technology while continuing to provide reliable and cost-effective utilities and services to community members.

FS-3 Regularly update system plans for capital facilities, utilities, and fire and enforcement services, identifying measurable objectives to maintain or improve services provided as infrastructure ages and the city grows.

FS-4 Coordinate and cooperate with Whatcom County, county fire and law enforcement agencies, the Port of Bellingham, and university police in the planning for fire protection, emergency services, and law enforcement in Bellingham and its unincorporated Urban Growth Area (UGA).

FS-5 Continue to coordinate with local jurisdictions in the Whatcom Unified Emergency Management partnership to prepare and respond to disaster events, including the maintenance of a reliable communication network with county agencies.

FS-B Proactively plan and implement a sustainable funding strategy for the anticipated capital facilities and service network needs.

FS-6 Ensure a sustainable approach to funding, planning, installing, and maintaining facilities and services, balancing proactive public investment with improvements and fees linked to private development.

FS-7 Regularly convene an interdepartmental team to evaluate recent and projected development trends across the city, identify impacts on City services, and determine changed staffing, service, or infrastructure needs.

FS-8 Implement a concurrency management system that assures that adequate public facilities and services are available at the time a development project is ready for occupancy without decreasing current service levels below locally established standards.

FS-9 Require new development to install or pay its proportional share of the cost of new or improved public facilities and services that serve the subject development, including streets, parks and trails, public utilities, public schools, and permit processing.

FS-10 Implement an administrative process that allows for departures from required infrastructure improvements in cases where no public purpose would be served by strict compliance with the required standard.

FS-11 Assess water utility fees at a rate adequate to fund the functioning of the water utility system.

FS-12 To prioritize the financing of public facilities within projected funding capacities, adopt a six-year CIP and update the plan as part of the City's regular budgeting cycle.

FS-13 To limit unplanned development and sprawl prior to annexation and its coordinated urban integration, prohibit new water and sewer utility extensions into the city's Urban Growth Area (UGA) prior to annexation, unless approved by the City Council.

FS-14 As the city grows or additional land is annexed, proactively define additional or expanded funding and financing mechanisms, such as utility rates, bonds, impact fees, local improvement districts, and grants, for funding the increased need for public facilities and services.

FS-15 Periodically update the City's annexation plan and Interlocal Agreements with Whatcom County and the existing utility and fire service districts to assure that Bellingham's UGA is planned to receive urban levels of infrastructure and services upon annexation.

FS-16 Coordinate with Whatcom County to ensure that development within Bellingham's UGA is consistent with major existing and planned transportation, utility, and open spaces or trails.

FS-C Foster equitable, efficient, sustainable, and considerate siting and maintenance of public and private facilities and infrastructure.

FS-17 Utilize processes to site new facilities that require consistency with the Bellingham Comprehensive Plan; incorporate regional coordination; emphasize public involvement; identify and minimize adverse impacts; and promote the equitable location of these facilities throughout the city, county and state.

FS-18 Support public and private investment in improved infrastructure in existing neighborhoods, particularly in areas with underinvested infrastructure.

FS-19 Site, design construct, and maintain capital facilities to avoid or minimize environmental impacts to the extent feasible.

FS-20 Weigh community needs and the potential adverse impacts when siting public and private facilities, particularly in residential zones. Minimize adverse impacts, particularly

for telecommunication technologies, through placement and design requirements and encouraging co-location of facilities.

FS-21 Provide setbacks and visual buffers to mitigate impacts of above-ground facilities. Include noise mitigation in circumstances which involve significant impacts on nearby uses.

FS-22 Require undergrounding of distribution utility lines where possible whenever new streets or significant portions of streets are constructed or when new utilities are added to existing streets.

FS-23 Promote joint use of utility corridors by private and public utilities whenever possible to minimize adverse and environmental impacts and use land efficiently.

FS-24 Provide timely and effective notice to interested utilities about road construction, maintenance and upgrades to facilitate coordination of public and private utility trenching activities and reduce disruption in the street rights-of-way.

FS-D Develop, maintain, and plan for the future needs of the City's buildings and equipment.

FS-25 Provide, maintain, and upgrade City buildings and equipment in a manner which meets primary service needs and protects public and worker health.

FS-26 Develop and implement a proactive plan to prioritize maintenance and anticipate improvement needs for existing City buildings, maximizing the reasonable lifespan of public investments. Identify and utilize efficiencies in implementing multiple improvements simultaneously.

FS-27 Maintain, retrofit, site, and build Bellingham's public buildings to serve as models for the community. Prioritize sustainable, environmentally sensitive, and accessible design and operation while meeting diverse needs; providing multimodal access; and using best practices, innovative techniques, and high-quality materials.

FS-28 Encourage the efficient use of energy, water, and materials, including adaptive reuse, in public buildings to conserve natural and consumable resources.

FS-29 Identify and plan for public services and associated facility needs as the city grows, particularly in the northern area of the city and in other areas of significant growth.

FS-30 Continue to focus a consolidated set of City services and administration in the City Center, providing a central public face to the community and contributing to economic development in the area.

FS-31 Encourage the use of appropriate public buildings as essential gathering places for the community, including transforming into emergency resources during emergencies or disasters.

FS-32 Encourage coordination between City departments, other public agencies, and public-serving organizations to efficiently utilize and share facilities and resources for the public benefit.

FS-E Plan for and implement a network of reliable City utilities to support the community's growing and shifting needs.

FS-33 Sustainably manage the city's water supply and protect the water quality and quantity within the Lake Whatcom Watershed to ensure the distribution of clean, safe drinking water.

FS-34 Ensure that City water reservoirs have adequate storage to meet the fire protection needs of the areas they service.

FS-35 When upgrading or extending water lines, sanitary sewer lines, or stormwater system infrastructure, consider opportunities for simultaneously upgrading or extending the other City utilities to efficiently meet City standards.

FS-36 Support efficient and reliable data transmission for City services and infrastructure, such as fire service or traffic lights, through maintenance of the City's fiber network.

FS-37 Reduce demand on local and regional utility systems by supporting water conservation efforts and promoting efficient use of existing resources.

FS-F Support a planned network of private utilities, systems, and other infrastructure that provide for community needs.

FS-38 Coordinate with private utility companies in planning service ahead of potential development shifts, such as for areas anticipating significant zoning changes or annexation.

FS-39 Collaborate with community organizations and private utility providers to promote waste reduction and recycling efforts and reduce demand for new energy generation or additional infrastructure.

FS-40 Support new telecommunications technologies and periodically review and update regulations to provide reliable and modern service to Bellingham customers.

FS-41 Utilize pipeline safety requirements to lessen the risk of third party damage to pipelines and help reduce adverse impacts to the public in the event of a pipeline failure.

FS-G Coordinate with and support the provision of other public facilities and infrastructure.

FS-42 Coordinate with State and County agencies, the transit authority, the housing authority, local school districts, and public higher education facilities to communicate anticipated growth and collaborate on planning how services and facilities may serve that growth over time.

FS-43 Regularly monitor demographic, land supply, and permit activity changes (particularly anticipated distribution of youth) on an annual basis and communicate these to the school districts, allowing them to anticipate future needs and acquire land for future facilities.

FS-44 Retain neighborhood schools in developed areas and work with the school districts to locate new schools consistent with the City's commitment to encourage infill development, walkability and compact growth.

FS-45 Work with the school districts that serve Bellingham and its UGA to utilize school impact fees to help offset the costs of new capacity necessary to serve the new development and allow the City and County to collect those fees on their behalf.

FS-46 Continue to work to provide consistency between the school districts' and institutions' facilities plans and the City's Comprehensive Plan.

Transportation

Fostering a safe, connected, and sustainable multimodal transportation network is essential to Bellingham's growth.

This chapter includes goals and policies to ensure that people of all ages and abilities can move around Bellingham by walking, rolling, biking, or taking transit. By prioritizing a multimodal transportation system that reduces dependency on single occupancy vehicles, we can achieve climate goals and promote public health.

City Documents Adopted Herein

These references are adopted as part of the Bellingham Plan, requiring the same process for updates as the plan itself.

- [Multimodal Transportation Plan](#): Identifying transportation inventory, funding sources, and major planned projects and improvements
- [Pedestrian Master Plan](#): Identifying future projects to create a more walkable community

- [Bicycle Master Plan](#): Identifying future projects to create a more bikeable community
- [ADA Transition Plan](#): Defining planned projects to provide ADA improvements to City buildings

References

These references are not adopted as part of this plan and may be updated periodically.

- [Transportation Reports On Annual Mobility \(TRAM\)](#)
- [Six-Year Transportation Improvement Program \(TIP\)](#)

T-A Provide a transportation system that prioritizes safety, comfort and reliability for all ages and abilities.

T-1 Coordinate with Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) and other transportation agencies to implement a comprehensive Safe Systems Approach that strives to eliminate serious injuries and fatalities.

T-2 Reduce vehicle speeds through traffic calming measures and enforcement, especially in school zones.

T-3 Proactively fund ongoing maintenance, preservation, and repair to sustain the substantial investments that the City has made to the transportation network.

T-4 Implement a consistent and intuitive bicycle and pedestrian wayfinding system with clear signage that helps users navigate key routes, destinations, and trail connections.

T-5 Develop pedestrian and bicycle facilities that minimize interactions with vehicular traffic, ensuring safe and comfortable routes for users of all ages and abilities.

T-6 Incorporate the needs of pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, and vehicle drivers into Bellingham's multimodal street standards with a focus on maximizing safety and comfort.

T-7 Continue to collaborate with WSDOT to ensure effectiveness, connectivity, and safety of I-5 and State Highways through Bellingham.

T-B Commit to transit as a key element of Bellingham's overall growth strategy.

T-8 Continue to collaborate with Whatcom Transportation Authority (WTA) to strategically employ transit as a key high occupancy mode of transportation, supporting their continued investment in the community.

T-9 Work closely with WTA to ensure that City and WTA policies are consistent, and prioritize transportation improvements that support and increase transit ridership and access by reducing barriers throughout the community.

T-10 Work with WTA to define the appropriate balance between route coverage and frequency, while accounting for priority transit populations and needs.

T-11 Collaborate with regional and local transit agencies to enhance reliable and efficient transit connections that enable seamless and convenient movement into and out of the city.

T-12 Regularly collaborate with WTA to evaluate current and future performance metrics to identify and address system inefficiencies.

T-C Provide a multimodal transportation network that promotes a community-wide mode-shift from single occupancy vehicles to more active transportation options such as walking, biking, and transit.

T-13 Regularly monitor and evaluate progress toward the 2045 Mode Shift Goals to inform programs, policies and projects.

T-14 Incorporate sidewalks, crosswalks, and bikeways identified in the Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plans into all transportation capital improvements on public streets, wherever feasible.

T-15 Develop and implement street standards and improvement requirements, such as sidewalks and bikeways, that are proportional to development impacts. Require new developments to provide for street improvements meeting that standard.

T-16 Maintain a simplified multimodal concurrency system that ensures adequate transportation capacity, supports planned growth, upholds level of service standards, and includes annual reporting on system performance.

T-17 Assess all new development for transportation impact fees to recover a proportional share of the costs of constructing planned transportation system improvements.

T-18 Develop innovative new methodology to measure, forecast, and mitigate negative impacts that new vehicle traffic may have on pedestrians, bicyclists, and public transit bus service when Transportation Impact Analyses are completed for new development.

T-19 Improve the efficiency and usability of the transportation network by employing Transportation Demand Management (TDM) strategies to incentivize alternatives to single-occupancy vehicle trips.

T-20 Serve as a leader in TDM by making walking, rolling, biking or taking transit a feasible and enjoyable commuting option for City employees.

T-21 Facilitate a community wide mode shift by periodically evaluating vehicle and bicycle parking needs and amending private development requirements and public infrastructure design as needed.

T-22 Utilize Census and other available data to track transportation mode to work and trip patterns to inform future decisions.

T-23 Reduce single-occupancy vehicle trips through continued collaboration with Whatcom Council Of Governments (WCOG) to implement commute trip reduction initiatives.

T-24 Evaluate the potential of future shared mobility services and develop a policy framework as appropriate.

T-D Ensure a multimodal transportation network that efficiently connects people to opportunity, social networks, recreation, and services.

T-25 Connect missing links within the citywide multimodal transportation network for all modes of transportation, including pedestrian, bicycle, transit, freight trucks and private automobiles.

T-26 Prioritize investments that maximize network efficiency across all modes of transportation.

T-27 Collaborate with WCOG, Whatcom County, nearby cities, and WSDOT to implement complete streets on State Routes, ensuring a unified multimodal standard.

T-28 Provide mobility choices and opportunities for people of all ages and abilities.

T-29 Develop and maintain select off-street multiuse paths and trails as accessible, safe and low stress transportation routes for cyclists and pedestrians of all ages and abilities.

T-30 Ensure clear, accessible transitions between streets and trails to provide safe and intuitive connections for all users.

T-31 Prioritize connections in alignment with the City's growth strategy, while considering environmental impacts.

T-E Ensure that the needs of diverse and vulnerable transportation users are addressed in all transportation projects and that facilities are accessible for all users.

T-32 Through a balanced prioritization process, invest in transportation infrastructure citywide, ensuring equitable investment across all modes of transportation.

T-33 Provide accessible multimodal transportation facilities for all abilities, and consider the experience and unique needs across ages, genders, races, ethnicities and incomes.

T-34 Intentionally manage accessibility, electric vehicle charging, delivery, and pick-up/drop-off in the parking supply on public and private properties.

T-35 Design multimodal transportation improvements with the safety and mobility needs of all user groups considered and with priority emphasis placed on the most vulnerable transportation user groups, as illustrated in Bellingham's Transportation Modal Hierarchy.

T-36 When existing transportation facilities are temporarily disrupted due to construction or other activities, safe, clearly marked, accessible, and protected detour routes should be provided for vulnerable transportation users

T-37 Collaborate closely with school districts to develop and implement strategies that prioritize the construction of sidewalks and bikeways supporting Safe Routes to School, ensuring safe and direct access for students and families.

Parks and Recreation

Parks and recreation are essential to Bellingham's quality of life and a defining community feature.

The extensive and connected park and trail system provides a sense of place, protects the environment and provides for a healthy, active and resilient community. This chapter guides the development of parks and recreational amenities, property acquisitions, maintenance and stewardship, enrichment programs and facility improvements. It emphasizes equitable access, inclusive services, new park forms and sustainable maintenance as the city urbanizes and grows.

city documents adopted herein

These references are adopted as part of the Bellingham Plan, requiring the same process for updates as the plan itself.

- [Parks, Recreation, and Open Space \(PRO\) Plan](#)

References

These references are not adopted as part of this plan and may be updated periodically.

- [Greenways Strategic Plan](#)

PR-A Provide high-quality park facilities and services that are accessible, inclusive and distributed equitably across Bellingham.

PR-1 Provide a system of parks, trails and open space so that all residents live within one-half mile safe route of a developed park and trail.

PR-2 Target property acquisitions that provide key trail linkages and enable infill parks in underserved areas.

PR-3 Target facility and program improvements that decrease barriers and expand park and recreation use by underserved communities.

PR-4 Provide recreational programs and cultural events that celebrate the diversity of the community.

PR-5 Locate new community gardens in underserved areas to improve food access, foster community and provide environmental benefits.

PR-B Create environments to support wellness and a sense of safety, connect people and nature and provide a sense of place.

PR-6 Develop new park forms and provide recreational opportunities based on setting and level of use.

PR-7 Develop parks and trails to take advantage of views of water, islands, ridgelines and mountains.

PR-8 Design parks, open space and shorelines that respect and integrate natural systems and connect people to nature.

PR-9 Provide opportunities for education and interpretation of historic, environmental and cultural resources in the park system.

PR-10 Improve safety and extend hours of use with ground lighting in parks, trails and parking areas.

PR-11 Activate open spaces with trails, trailheads, loop trails and events.

PR-12 Incorporate art and whimsy into park facilities.

PR-13 Acquire and develop additional water access for the public.

PR-14 Design and develop facilities to be efficient, with low maintenance and operations costs.

PR-15 Design and prioritize system upgrades that respond to condition assessments, capital improvement plans, community vision and preferences.

PR-C Conserve nature and enhance climate resilience within the park system.

PR-16 Acquire environmental features that reflect Bellingham's unique natural character, including ridgelines, critical areas, forests and wildlife corridors.

PR-17 Manage urban forests and street trees for human wellness and safety, to provide shade, improve wildlife habitat, sequester greenhouse gases and mitigate fire hazards.

PR-18 Take action to improve facilities, parks and beaches to serve as areas of respite during extreme weather events.

PR-19 Continue to incorporate the City's climate response objectives into park design and development projects to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

PR-20 Acquire property within designated open space corridors between and within urban growth areas that provide recreation opportunities, protect habitat, species migration, critical areas, forest cover and buffer working lands.

PR-21 Balance the demand for public access and interpretive education with protection of environmentally sensitive areas and historic sites.

PR-D Develop innovative and diverse programs, services and strategies for improving recreational opportunities.

PR-22 Develop programming and facilities that promote public health and wellness, encourage leisure, fun and games and strengthen community connections.

PR-23 Enhance safety with a presence in parks and trails through programming, recreation, education and enforcement.

PR-24 Evaluate opportunities to renovate existing facilities and develop multiuse facilities, including indoor recreation and community centers.

PR-25 Enhance aquatics and recreation opportunities at the Civic Athletic Complex.

PR-26 Expand reservable spaces such as enclosed meeting rooms and outdoor shelters suitable for a variety of event types to meet community needs.

PR-E Utilize trails to interconnect the city's parks and open spaces.

PR-27 Integrate and expand signage, wayfinding and outreach materials that guide users through and between trails and clearly establish rules for use.

PR-28 Explore trail surface alternatives that balance the natural character of Bellingham's trail system with accessibility requirements, long-term maintenance, sustainable development practices and availability of local materials.

PR-29 Improve public education about safe trail use to ensure they function for a range of recreation and transportation users.

PR-30 Target improvements that connect trails with transit stops, key destinations, bike routes and sidewalks to improve non-motorized transportation options.

PR-F Operate and maintain parks, trails and facilities effectively and sustainably.

PR-31 Establish clear maintenance standards for park assets and evaluate and report progress towards meeting standards and improving conditions.

PR-32 Prioritize capital maintenance improvements based on safety, condition, equity factors and number of people served.

PR-33 Explore options to improve enforcement of park rules while ensuring all park users feel welcome.

PR-34 Proactively upgrade and restore existing facilities to address community needs, improve resilience and protect the longevity of existing park assets.

PR-35 Steward and protect the park system from invasive species, illegal activity and repair and restore damage where needed.

PR-36 Develop and implement metrics to evaluate ongoing costs in property acquisitions, park and trail development and recreation programming.

PR-G Cultivate strong partnerships and community collaboration to enhance recreational opportunities.

PR-37 Work with community organizations and across City departments to keep parks safe, welcoming, maintained and clean.

PR-38 Identify ways to support outside agencies to improve access and conditions at non-City recreational facilities.

PR-39 Explore partnerships that expand services or leverage support for specific projects.

PR-40 Involve the community in habitat restoration and maintenance activities through the Parks Volunteer Program.

PR-41 Partner and collaborate with local service providers to fill in gaps in equitable programming, events and services.

PR-42 Link open space and trail corridors with those of adjacent jurisdictions and agencies.

Climate

Our community recognizes the importance of proactively reducing and preparing for inevitable climate change impacts.

Given the long-term shifts in temperatures and weather patterns, this chapter provides a vision for minimizing emissions and staying resilient to climate-related human health and environmental impacts. This framework will help us collaboratively work towards a vision of net zero emissions by 2050.

References

These references are not adopted as part of this plan and may be updated periodically.

- [Climate Action Plan](#)
- [Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan](#)

C-A Implement a unified, proactive and collaborative citywide approach to address climate change in the community.

C-1 Respond to climate change through citywide implementation of science-based climate mitigation and adaptation action plans that include emissions reduction targets, community resilience goals and prioritized mitigation and adaptation actions.

C-2 Provide safe environments in either public or private facilities during climatic and other events that endanger, displace or otherwise impact community health, safety and well-being.

C-3 Model the City's leadership and commitment to addressing climate change across all municipal facilities, operations and civic practices.

C-4 Coordinate climate plan updates and climate response programs with neighboring local and regional jurisdictions.

C-5 Encourage public-private partnerships with higher education institutions, nonprofit groups and other agencies to address climate change.

C-6 Foster business opportunities and workforce training associated with climate mitigation and adaptation.

C-7 Provide culturally informed outreach and education initiatives and materials that will inform the community about near-term and longer-term climate change impacts and build resilience.

C-8 Facilitate community awareness and readiness to implement changing climate-supportive state requirements such as the Clean Buildings Act.

C-B Integrate equity and inclusion factors into all climate program design and implementation actions.

C-9 Implement a climate equity and engagement plan, in alignment with Citywide strategies, that ensures climate program benefits, educational components and resources are equitably distributed and impacts to all populations are minimized.

C-10 Link climate mitigation and resilience strategies with social equity and public health strategies to limit the impacts of climate change on vulnerable communities.

C-11 Build and support partnerships with community organizations to convene diverse coalitions of residents and to educate and empower them to implement climate mitigation and resilience actions.

C-C Protect community health, wellbeing, infrastructure and the natural environment from extreme weather impacts, such as drought, flood and extreme heat or cold.

C-12 Develop, implement and regularly update as needed a comprehensive drought resilience strategy that factors in projected climate impacts and sets action levels for drought stages.

C-13 Implement and regularly update a comprehensive floodplain management strategy that considers climate change, including extreme precipitation, increased winter streamflow, sea-level rise and other impacts.

C-14 Consider increased flooding events in land use planning, development requirements and the siting of buildings or infrastructure.

C-15 Develop, implement and regularly update a climate resilience plan that addresses extreme temperature impacts to people, infrastructure and buildings.

C-D Protect community health, wellbeing, infrastructure and the natural environment from wildfire impacts.

C-16 Develop, implement, and regularly update a wildfire smoke response plan in partnership with community members, emergency management staff, regional clean air agency officials and other stakeholders to mitigate risk and exposure, especially for high risk community members.

C-17 Develop, implement, and regularly update a comprehensive, community-wide wildfire resilience strategy to improve emergency response capabilities, create fire-resilient

landscapes, promote fire-adapted communities, protect the economy and foster short- and long-term recovery.

C-E Protect community health, wellbeing, infrastructure and the natural environment from sea level rise.

C-18 Design, site and build infrastructure, natural system restoration and recreation projects to avoid sea level rise impacts, or provide feasible mitigation.

C-19 Incorporate sea-level rise, storm surge and tsunami hazard information into land use and development requirements and emergency management response planning.

C-20 Assess the vulnerability of wetlands, aquatic vegetation, beaches, bluffs and other valuable natural assets to sea level rise.

C-F Anticipate and plan for sustainable, resilient resources to meet community needs.

C-21 Include land use, social services access, housing, jobs and other considerations in planning for a potential influx of people displaced due to climate change.

C-22 Support opportunities for businesses to adapt their operations in anticipation or in response to a changing climate.

C-23 Bolster the local food system's resiliency to the impacts of extreme weather and other natural hazards worsened by climate change.

C-24 Continue to evaluate the impacts of changes to temperature and hydrologic patterns on the municipal water supply's quality, quantity and infrastructure to ensure that changes due to climate can be anticipated and managed effectively.

C-25 Encourage building retrofits, particularly those with sensitive land uses, that make them more resilient to natural disasters and climate change.

C-26 Ensure that the community is able to reduce, reuse, recycle and compost waste materials sustainably.

C-G Protect, enhance and restore ecosystems that could be adversely impacted by climate change.

C-27 Manage the urban forest system to boost carbon sequestration, reduce heat islands, improve air quality and improve tree and watershed health.

C-28 Increase the resilience of native plant and animal species and their habitats to climate change.

C-29 Take early action to eliminate or control non-native invasive species that take advantage of climate change, especially where invasives threaten native species or ecosystem function.

C-30 Use an integrated approach to prevent and address the establishment or spread of pests and disease that impact ecosystems and thrive in a changing climate.

C-H Ensure that buildings use renewable energy, conservation and efficiency technologies and practices to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, improve air quality and conserve natural resources.

C-31 Reduce carbon emissions by encouraging the preservation and renovation of existing and historic buildings and prioritizing the use of lower embodied carbon, long-lived and low-maintenance building materials in new construction or building retrofits.

C-32 Use regulations, incentives and green building rating systems to promote and encourage energy efficiency, the use of renewable (non-fossil-fuel) energy sources and sustainable construction practices in existing and new buildings and site designs throughout the community.

C-33 Promote the electrification of existing and new buildings with approaches such as education, technical assistance, design services, financing incentives, homeowner co-ops and more.

C-34 Investigate the feasibility of developing and implementing district energy systems.

C-I Eliminate Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions from municipal and community transportation by focusing on multimodal transportation, zero emissions vehicles and modernizing parking requirements.

C-35 Continue to implement and improve multimodal and active transportation systems to reduce fossil fuel reliance, vehicle miles traveled and vehicle emissions.

C-36 Support and invest in the adoption and use of zero emissions modes of transportation within the city, by implementing regulations, programs and subsidies.

C-37 Support the expansion of electric vehicle infrastructure, including the well-distributed placement of charging stations on private and public property, including rights-of-way.

C-38 Modernize vehicle and bicycle parking requirements to achieve climate objectives while improving air quality and bicyclist and pedestrian safety.

C-J Encourage and support renewable energy generation and use.

C-39 Encourage, support and implement renewable energy infrastructure and systems, and evaluate potential future energy and energy storage projects.

C-40 Maximize the generation and use of renewable energy sources to supply electricity and heat for municipal and community buildings and transportation needs.

C-41 Ensure energy infrastructure can accommodate clean energy programs.

Environment

Bellingham's key environmental features and values are critical to sustainability.

These natural elements support recreation and human health, provide vital habitat and create inherent beauty. In planning for future growth and development, we recognize the need to protect, enhance and restore the environment in a carefully planned and coordinated manner. This ensures that environmental benefits to both humans and wildlife can be enjoyed for generations to come.

City Documents Adopted Herein

These references are adopted as part of the Bellingham Plan, requiring the same process for updates as the plan itself.

- [Shoreline Master Plan](#)

References

These references are not adopted as part of this plan and may be updated periodically.

- [Lake Whatcom Management Program 2025-2029 Work Plan](#)

EV-A Protect and improve aquatic ecosystems including lakes, streams, wetlands, floodplains and the Salish Sea.

EV-1 Improve water quality, especially in waterbodies with listed water quality impairments, by protecting, enhancing or restoring riparian and aquatic ecosystems.

EV-2 Maintain water quantity in streams, wetlands and lakes by protecting, enhancing or restoring hydrologic processes.

EV-3 Protect, enhance or restore fish and wildlife habitats and corridors in riparian, freshwater and marine ecosystems.

EV-4 Protect, enhance or restore ecological functions such as flood storage, habitat and conveyance in frequently flooded areas.

EV-5 Protect, enhance or restore aquatic marine nearshore and estuarine areas when implementing measures for resiliency against coastal flooding and sea level rise.

EV-6 Manage the city's surface and stormwater to protect aquatic resources, improve fish habitat, respond to flooding and erosion damages, reduce flood risk and reduce the discharge of pollutants into the environment that impact aquatic resources.

EV-7 Develop and implement urban forest management strategies that result in water quality and water quantity benefits.

EV-8 Give special consideration to conservation and protection measures necessary to protect and restore anadromous fisheries.

EV-B Protect and improve terrestrial ecosystems.

EV-9 Protect, enhance or restore wildlife habitat and corridors in terrestrial ecosystems.

EV-10 Protect intact cliffs, bluffs and embankments that are within priority habitat blocks and corridors to maintain critical habitat and geologic processes.

EV-11 Adopt, implement and update a comprehensive urban forest plan to support a healthy and resilient urban forest through well-coordinated, consistent, efficient and sustainable long-term urban forestry management.

EV-12 Regularly monitor and evaluate progress towards canopy coverage goals, to be included in an urban forestry plan, to inform programs, policies and practices.

EV-13 Develop management strategies that integrate the city's tree canopy and green infrastructure with increasing urban growth patterns. Consider mechanisms that support active management and increased tree preservation.

EV-C Protect and improve natural systems and ensure environmental sustainability through coordinated natural resource management and planning.

EV-14 Continue to create, update and utilize an inventory of best available science to preserve and enhance ecosystem-wide functions and processes through policies, regulations, programs and incentives.

EV-15 Utilize natural resource assessments, plans and regulations that identify high priority aquatic and terrestrial habitat areas, corridors and corridor breaks to guide annexation, zoning, urban growth area expansion, restoration, mitigation site selection and capital facility planning.

EV-16 Continue to implement programs, regulations and incentives that result in sustainable land use practices, such as Low Impact Development (LID) stormwater

management techniques, that prevent the degradation of water quality and sustain watershed processes.

EV-17 Incorporate sustainable land use practices and design elements into public and private projects early in the planning stages to avoid impacts to ecological functions and habitats, including critical areas.

EV-18 Ensure coordination among City departments in planning, constructing and maintaining City facilities and infrastructure to protect ecological functions and habitats.

EV-19 Protect fish, wildlife and pollinator habitats and corridors from development impacts, such as light, noise, pollutants and fragmentation; and provide mitigation for unavoidable impacts.

EV-20 Require mitigation sequencing early in project planning stages to safeguard ecological functions and values.

EV-21 Ensure wetland mitigation sites are selected based on current state mitigation guidance documents, best available science and on the watershed approach with an emphasis on the ecologically-preferable site with high potential for success.

EV-22 Pursue development of mitigation options such as a City mitigation bank, in-lieu fee and advanced mitigation programs.

EV-23 Manage and employ measures to minimize impacts to environmentally-sensitive areas from public access, especially from illicit uses, solid waste and domestic animals.

EV-24 Manage recreational uses in a manner that prevents degradation of water quality and habitat.

EV-25 Support ecological functions and the restoration of natural systems by promoting the use of native plants, controlling the spread of invasive species and creating guidance for human-assisted movement of species to more suitable habitats.

EV-26 Provide opportunities for public education and engagement to promote awareness and responsible individual actions for environmental stewardship.

EV-27 Work in cooperation with other agencies, tribes, groups and community volunteers to support biodiversity and protection and restoration of native vegetation, fish, wildlife and pollinator habitat.

EV-28 Continue to collaborate with relevant partners to restore, protect and preserve Lake Whatcom and its surrounding watershed.

EV-29 Continue collaborating with relevant partners on initiatives within Water Resource Inventory Area 1 (WRIA 1) to address water quality and quantity, in-stream flow, fish habitat and passage and salmon recovery.

EV-30 Continue collaborating with relevant partners to incorporate land use planning and habitat restoration into the cleanup of State-listed contaminated sites within Bellingham Bay.

EV-31 Continue partnering with Whatcom County and other neighboring jurisdictions to assess vulnerability and formulate mitigation strategies for natural hazards.

EV-32 Continue collaborating with state agencies regarding state and local forest practices within the city for all phases of the conversion of forestland including: Land clearing and grading; Protection of critical areas; Wildfire and wildland-urban interface; and Efforts to address nuisance abatements consistent with Bellingham's development regulations and the urban forest plan.

EV-D Recognize the environment's inherent value and essential role in supporting human health and wellbeing.

EV-33 Foster environmental equity and justice, where the community has fair and equitable access to environmental resources and benefits, protection from environmental hazards and participation in environmental decision making.

EV-34 Consider factors that contribute to maintaining healthy outdoor air quality and acknowledge its importance to human health and wellbeing.

EV-35 Discourage the use of toxic chemicals and promote the safe disposal of hazardous materials or other waste products, including pharmaceuticals, to protect the environment and public health.

EV-36 Coordinate with State and federal agencies to support and encourage the cleanup of contaminated soil and other environmental remediation activities.

EV-37 Protect people and public resources and facilities from injury, loss of life or property damage due to landslides and steep slope failures, erosion, seismic events or flooding.

EV-38 Encourage and expand access to nature and green spaces to foster human health and connection with the environment.

EV-39 Encourage the preservation and planting of trees on private and public property due to their environmental, economic, health and social benefits.

EV-40 Encourage regenerative ecological design, which focuses on creating human and natural systems that work together.

EV-41 Explore opportunities to collaborate with local tribes to consider the use of traditional ecological knowledge - which incorporates indigenous knowledge, practices and beliefs - into decision-making and resource management.

Economic Development

Creating jobs and improving the quality of life is essential for all workers and residents.

This chapter provides a framework to improve the economic prosperity of Bellingham through efforts that encourage the creation and retention of jobs, enhance the local tax base and solidify our role in the greater region.

References

These references are not adopted as part of this plan and may be updated periodically.

- [Whatcom County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy \(CEDS\) 2022-2026](#)

ED-A Continue coordination and collaboration with local and regional economic development organizations to retain, grow and attract industries and businesses that provide living wage jobs in Bellingham.

ED-1 Coordinate City activities and share resources with agencies, organizations, and coalitions that provide direct economic development and other business services.

ED-2 Continue to build strong working relationships with Whatcom County, the Port of Bellingham and other nearby cities within Whatcom County to address regional economic development issues and support a thriving regional economy.

ED-3 Support the Port of Bellingham's primary role in growing Bellingham's economy, including efforts to advance Bellingham International Airport and redevelop the waterfront.

ED-4 Work with the Port of Bellingham, Whatcom County and others to explore and pursue opportunities to increase Bellingham's global relations, especially with British Columbia, Canada. Strive for new investment and expansion from regional, national and international businesses.

ED-5 Recognize Bellingham's strategic role in the Cascadia Region and commit to advocating for future high-speed rail and other regional collaboration and connectivity efforts.

ED-6 Aid the efforts of business associations to promote economic activities and tourism.

ED-7 Continue to support events, facilities, and other tourism related activities through the use of the City's lodging tax.

ED-8 Maintain partnerships to continue and grow regional recreation amenities, such as Galbraith Mountain and Civic Athletic Complex.

ED-9 Partner with Whatcom County and the Port of Bellingham to conduct a regional employment study to assess existing and anticipated land, infrastructure and supporting service needs; identify Bellingham's key employment sectors; and evaluate barriers to and explore strategies necessary for sustainable and diversified economic growth in Bellingham.

ED-B Foster and sustain a supportive and inclusive business environment that promotes collaboration and growth in both the public and private sectors.

ED-10 Periodically review and adjust to the impacts of the City's regulatory structure, taxes, fees and utility rates on Bellingham's economic development goals .

ED-11 Continually review and evaluate the City's permit processes in order to provide timely, cost-effective services and predictable outcomes.

ED-12 Recognize and consider the potential economic impacts of proposed legislative actions prior to adoption.

ED-13 Work with partners to support businesses in developing environmentally-friendly practices.

ED-14 Continue to support the infrastructure and expansion needs of higher education institutions, school districts, healthcare providers, the Port of Bellingham and other major employers that offer a diverse range of living wage jobs.

ED-15 Support the ongoing efforts and programs of Bellingham's educational institutions and businesses that connect education to industry and train workers to meet the current and future needs of local businesses.

ED-16 Support efforts to make it easier for businesses to learn about and act on opportunities to get started in Bellingham.

ED-17 Support the retention and growth of Bellingham's locally-based or owned businesses.

ED-18 Support the retention and growth of businesses providing opportunities for skilled employment and living wage jobs, especially the industrial/manufacturing sectors.

ED-19 Continue to support a downtown that

- Is economically healthy;
- Uses environmentally-friendly building and business practices; and
- Offers a variety of residential, retail, office, service, cultural, civic and recreational opportunities.

ED-20 Continue to support public safety, behavioral health services, cleaning and beautification in downtown and other urban villages, recognizing that these are foundational elements of a welcoming and healthy business environment.

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.

ED-C Ensure sufficient employment lands and supporting infrastructure for numerous and diverse employment opportunities.

ED-22 Periodically assess the adequacy of the supply of vacant and redevelopable employment lands in Bellingham and the Urban Growth Area (UGA), considering environmental constraints, especially land zoned for industry.

ED-23 Support the development of marine trades and related industries in the Waterfront District.

ED-24 Explore options for public-private partnerships that would maximize public benefit when redeveloping City-owned properties.

ED-25 Reduce barriers to the efficient development of vacant or underutilized employment lands and buildings, such as reviewing land use regulations, incentives, development standards and design guidelines.

ED-26 Promote the efficient use/reuse of employment lands by coordinating with other levels of government to support and encourage the cleanup of contaminated soil and other environmental remediation activities.

ED-27 Evaluate rezone proposals, changes to development regulations, and City land acquisitions for potential impacts on the supply of land zoned for employment activities.

ED-28 Identify employment land that lacks sufficient infrastructure and coordinate City investments in utilities, transportation and other public facilities with business and employment opportunities whenever possible.

ED-29 Encourage urban villages, especially the City Center, to develop as employment centers, allowing a wide range of permitted uses to support their redevelopment and vibrancy.

ED-D Encourage programs and practices that support and sustain the Bellingham workforce.

ED-30 Recognize that childcare is a critical component of workforce participation and economic growth, and promote easy to access, affordable and high-quality childcare services.

ED-31 Regularly assess the gap between wages and housing availability and incorporate that assessment into planning for housing action.

ED-32 Recognize the connection between economic development and quality of life factors such as a healthy environment, locally-based food production, arts and culture and recreation opportunities.

ED-33 Continue to provide early career and job training opportunities in City government.

ED-34 Encourage continued and expanded transportation options, such as aviation and rail, connecting Portland, Oregon, Seattle, Bellingham and Vancouver, British Columbia, and ferry service to the San Juan Islands, British Columbia and Alaska.

ED-35 Encourage public-private partnerships to finance or manage facilities and services which promote community and economic opportunities.

Community Wellbeing

Community wellbeing is a combination of social, economic, environmental, cultural, and civic factors that support a connected, safe and equitable society.

This chapter considers the socioeconomic determinants of health to address systemic issues and promote positive community health outcomes. Community wellbeing is achieved when everyone can meet their basic needs, feel safe, connect with others and engage in City government.

References

These references are not adopted as part of this plan and may be updated periodically.

- [Whatcom County Community Health Improvement Plan 2022-2026](#)
- [Whatcom County Food Systems Plan](#)

Whatcom County Justice Project Needs Assessment Implementation Plan

CW-A Confront systemic and regional community health and wellbeing issues through ample social services, a resilient food system and interactive programming.

CW-1 Foster and support partnerships and approaches that have proven to be successful in:

- Reducing food insecurity, homelessness and other issues that are detrimental to community health; and
- Promoting positive health and wellbeing outcomes.

CW-2 Reduce barriers to establishing healthcare, childcare, grocery stores, faith-based, and educational uses through permissive land use and navigable permitting and review processes.

CW-3 Leverage public safety resources and partnerships to continue to support the goals in the Whatcom County Justice Project Implementation Plan (JPIP), including strategies to address substance-use challenges, behavioral health issues, childcare, therapeutic courts and a wide range of other urgent community needs.

CW-4 Collaborate with Whatcom County to further their actions and plans in providing and promoting health and community services, regional parks and recreation and a sustainable regional food system.

CW-5 Consider the importance of local and regional food systems assets and infrastructure in policy decisions, encouraging locally-based food production, processing, distribution and consumption, such as through community gardens, urban farming and farmers and seafood markets.

CW-6 Encourage access to a diversity of nutritious, affordable, and culturally-appropriate food by exploring opportunities to support, incentivize, or encourage the location of food purveyors and urban food production near residential areas and transit, especially in low-income and underserved areas.

CW-7 Promote and encourage food waste reduction and food recovery initiatives as part of a healthy and resilient local food system.

CW-8 Encourage activity for all ages and abilities through parks and recreation, educational and cultural programming, active transportation and other city amenities.

CW-9 Consider the experience and changing needs of residents as they age through universal design approaches, accessible facilities and social opportunities and programming.

CW-B Foster community vitality, reduce loneliness, and promote a positive sense of belonging through safety and connection.

CW-10 Further a culture of support and belonging within Bellingham that aspires to be more understanding, respectful and accountable to those who experience marginalization and exclusion.

CW-11 Support and encourage a variety of flexible and adaptive gathering spaces for the community to come together and strengthen connections, including spaces for all ages, abilities, cultures, identities and traditions.

CW-12 Provide and support programming and safety of large community gatherings within the City Center.

CW-13 Continue implementing proactive safety strategies, such as community-oriented policing, bike patrols and community paramedics, to support safe neighborhoods.

CW-14 Maintain support for incarceration diversion strategies, such as alternative response programs or other outreach teams, throughout our community.

CW-15 Work to decrease public health risks, social tensions and environmental impacts related to unauthorized encampments by leveraging resources to promote safety and wellbeing, balancing the needs of individuals experiencing homelessness with those of nearby residents and businesses.

CW-16 Continue to prioritize bold actions and innovative thinking to ensure a thriving future for Downtown Bellingham, providing opportunities for all community members to live, work or play.

CW-17 Foster lifelong learning and social interaction opportunities for all ages through City programs and partnerships that support a curious, informed and resilient community.

CW-18 Amplify the adopted Library and Museum standards and policies as Bellingham grows, to ensure the City continues to support personal and community enrichment and be welcoming and easy to access for all.

CW-C Promote and celebrate Bellingham's arts and culture.

CW-19 Support our community's commitment to arts and culture and our Downtown Arts District.

CW-20 Involve artists and creative workers in integrating art into public places and events that celebrate Bellingham's diverse identities.

CW-21 Integrate indigenous culture and history into the community dialogue, art installations and event programming, recognizing and respecting its importance in the region.

CW-22 Foster curiosity and joy about our world by continuing to support and expand access to creative and interactive opportunities at the Museum, Library and in the broader arts community.

CW-23 Promote cultural awareness and education for all ages through City programs, partnerships, communication, and ongoing fulfillment of the Parks & Recreation, Museum, Library and Theatre missions.

CW-D Expand and strengthen equity and inclusion throughout the City's civic processes and practices.

CW-24 Develop and implement a strategic plan to guide the City's work in building a more equitable and welcoming Bellingham for all.

CW-25 Promote community understanding about racism's impact on health and wellbeing, working with local organizations to further Bellingham as an anti-racist community.

CW-26 Foster inclusion and diverse representation in the City workforce, particularly for first responders and others that interact with the public, including through training opportunities, accessible hiring and appointment processes and a supportive workplace culture.

CW-27 Foster community representation in City decision-making, by evaluating opportunities to tailor the appointment process and reduce barriers to achieve a diverse perspective and representative set of advisory groups.

CW-28 Provide inclusive guidance and resources to welcome residents of all backgrounds as they interact with the City, supporting them in navigating complex processes with greater ease.

CW-29 Proactively reduce barriers to make City services and facilities more accessible, available and easily navigable, ensuring access to all.

CW-30 Explore and quantify disparities in both beneficial and detrimental impacts of past, current, and proposed City practices. Consider factors such as access to infrastructure, City services and programs and housing and economic opportunity.

CW-31 Identify under-invested and marginalized communities and direct resources to reduce disparities between areas and populations.

CW-E Foster a welcoming environment for outreach and engagement by inviting and enabling community members to be involved in City government.

CW-32 Continue implementing systems and strategies to inform the community of City processes and provide meaningful opportunities for public engagement.

CW-33 Build community trust and foster transparency in City decision-making processes.

CW-34 Proactively reduce barriers to engagement for community members across a continuum of needs and abilities, prioritizing access, accessibility, ease of use and cultural sensitivity.

CW-35 Coordinate and balance community engagement efforts, ensuring outreach is sensitive to social context and overall community capacity.

CW-36 Strive to tailor community outreach strategies, considering an achievable range of engagement levels before identifying the appropriate approach methods to meet specific project needs and address community expectations.

CW-37 Continually evaluate effectiveness of engagement strategies to reach populations that may be most impacted by the City decision(s) under consideration.

CW-38 Focus resources to increasing involvement by under-represented and historically-marginalized community members.

CW-39 Foster a culture of service among City staff, supporting and enhancing their roles as City ambassadors.

CW-F Strengthen relationships and engagement processes with tribal nations and indigenous community members through informed practices that respect tribal sovereignty and honor treaty rights.

CW-40 Provide and prioritize opportunities for City staff to learn about appropriate engagement practices, and tribal governance, culture and history.

CW-41 Actively listen to tribal nations to better understand their needs and priorities; utilize this input to inform and refine City processes in closer alignment with their interests.

CW-42 Uphold City government relationships and protocols with tribal governments, prioritizing early and ongoing consultation or communication about City plans, projects and processes.

CW-43 Elevate the important relationship between tribal leadership and the City's elected executive.

CW-44 Standardize internal protocols, improving consistency and centralization of tribal engagement processes Citywide.

CW-45 Welcome and seek opportunities to build relationships and greater connection with the indigenous community, both for the public and between tribal and City leaders.

CW-46 Support enhanced community awareness, recognition and understanding of tribal nations and indigenous cultures through culturally appropriate actions that are responsive to tribal input.