The Bellingham Plan

Chapter Update Summaries

November 2024

# Information for All Chapters

Get a quick overview of the most significant updates we're proposing.

If you haven't yet, take a look at the [Summary of Proposed Updates](https://cob.org/wp-content/uploads/Summary-of-Proposed-Changes_Accessible.docx). It describes the most significant updates we are proposing. We recommend viewing that the summary first, and then diving in here for more details on transportation.

## Topics (later goals)

Each chapter includes topic areas that represent what will later become goals in that chapter. These will be the overarching goals for the City, with more specific policies to support them.

## Concepts (later policies)

Under each topic, there are concepts listed under each of the following categories. Each concept may become a single policy or several in the final document.

**Existing**: *This concept exists in the 2016 Comprehensive Plan already.*

**Update**: *Either this concept will be emphasized more than in the current plan, or something minor is being changed about it.*

**New**: *This concept does not exist in the 2016 plan at all or will include significant changes.*

## Community Feedback

As you learn about the concepts proposed in this chapter, think about…

* Is anything big missing?
* Are you excited or concerned about any of the ideas proposed here?

## Structural Changes

Each chapter has a section at the end that walks through structural changes from the 2016 Comprehensive Plan. If you are familiar with that plan and are looking for a topic that was in the 2016 chapter, it may be located in another part of the plan.

# Land Use

## What the Community Said

*These descriptions summarize the most common opinions we heard relevant to this chapter.*

* We should develop more around our transit corridors and in our Urban Villages. More transit service over time will be important.
* We need more mixed-use neighborhoods.
* Some small businesses would be great in our residential neighborhoods, but we are worried about parking and noise impacts.
* It is important to be able to walk (or sometimes bike or bus) to some essential places, especially for groceries and other food.
* New commercial areas or Urban Villages could help fill gaps in the community, especially in the north part of the city.
* We are worried about expanding into and removing natural areas if our city boundaries increase.
* We want to make sure that the changes to our residential areas are equitable and affect all neighborhoods similarly.

## Summary of Updates

We are proposing a variety of updates to our 2016 Comprehensive Plan. While the plan is divided into distinct chapters, there are updates that touch multiple chapters.

Here are the most significant updates related to Land Use. These themes span multiple chapters beyond this one.

* Inclusive and equitable citywide planning
* More middle housing like triplexes and townhomes
* Transit corridors connecting urban nodes
* Future process to plan transit corridors
* Allowing small-scale businesses in all residential areas
* Planning long-term infrastructure needs

## Land Use Chapter Draft Topics

* Limiting Sprawl: Limit urban sprawl & cluster growth in compact, walkable/transitable areas.
* Urban Growth Area & Annexation: Intentionally plan any future changes to the city’s boundary.
* Urban Villages: Foster vibrant urban villages.
* Transit Corridors: Encourage growth and transit service to grow together*.*
* Land Use Mix: Ensure a variety of land uses to support future needs.
* Complete Neighborhoods: Promote neighborhoods complete with housing, gathering spaces, goods and services.

## Limiting Sprawl

Existing

* Land area to meet targets
* Growth strategy: Urban Villages and transit corridors between them
* Cluster near facilities/ amenities (efficient use of resources, preserve nature)
* Preservation of land outside UGAs: *UGAs (Urban Growth Areas) are the areas that the city could grow into.*
* Watershed protection

## Urban Growth Area & Annexation

Existing

* UGA planning coordination: *Including coordination of services, infrastructure, and open space corridors*
* Process for changes to UGA
* Annexation priorities and process

Update

* Financial analysis for future annexations: Ensuring that annexations are considered holistically as well as individually

New

* Conditions of annexation: Ensuring that future annexation areas are able to provide needed infrastructure and land use mixes

## Urban Villages

Existing

* Mixed-use, pedestrian-oriented, and vibrant
* Each Urban Village planned individually and monitored
* Incentivizing and coordinating development in Urban Villages
* City Center as core center

New

* Identification priorities for future Urban Villages: *Filling community gaps, transit accessibility, options in the north part of the city*

## Transit Corridors

Existing

* Development of land use plans along frequent transit
* Avoiding auto-oriented strip development

Update

* Transit as connections between Urban Villages and important destinations: *Renewed emphasis*

New

* Smaller nodes along transit at major stops (transit-oriented development): Clustering commercial uses and focusing pedestrian improvements in these areas
* Coordinated planning in these corridors: Planning with all, not just one, of the following:
* Frequent transit, adequate development density, enhanced pedestrian environment, and balanced parking
* Investing in set frequent transit routes; coordinating other, more fluid transit with land use: Clearly defining when land use or transit leads the other

## Land Use Mix

Existing

* Encouraging public amenities in large private projects
* Reserving and separating industrial land
* Planning near the airport

Update

* Monitoring and updating land supply in alignment with economy and needs: *Emphasis of alignment with economic and community needs*
* Support for human services and service-enriched housing spread across the city: *HB 1220 (2021) + HB 1923 (2019). Allowing transitional housing, permanent supportive housing, emergency housing, and emergency shelters more broadly across the city; Encouraging an equitable distribution across the city*

New

* Definitions of each land use designation: Shifting all existing definitions here. *HB 1110 (2023) Adjusting residential definitions to reflect a gradient between “house-scale” residential and high density residential; allowing small-scale commercial throughout this gradient*

## Complete Neighborhoods

Existing

* Small-scale commercial uses promotion: *Limiting barriers to introducing uses that are missing and needed in some areas but present in other similar areas*

New

* Equitable mix of uses: *Limiting barriers to introducing uses that are missing and needed in some areas but present in other similar areas*
* Limit size, density, and operation of small commercial uses in residential areas: Additional detail to the first concept;
* Aligned with community interest to limit individual use size, number of commercial uses in an area, hours of operation, and impacts like noise
* Flexibility in size and uses along arterials and near Urban Villages and amenities: Applies to both residential and commercial uses, aligned with community input
* Activation of public spaces: Encouraging uses facing public spaces that activate them and make them more vibrant and enjoyable

## Future Land Use Map

The future land use map also lives in this chapter. *This map guides zoning across the city. The below outlines the major updates anticipated for it.*

Update

* Identification of transit corridor connections as area for future study

New

* Reflect growth strategy updates outlined in previous slides
* Consolidation of Residential Single and Multi areas into new residential range
* Potential changes to the UGA (Urban Growth Area)

*This map shows updates under consideration for the UGA (the area into which the city can grow) and the UGA Reserve (the next round of areas for evaluation to become part of the UGA).*



## Shifts within the Land Use Chapter

Sustainable Land Use into Limiting Sprawl and reduce redundancy with Environment Chapter.

Urban Growth Area & Annexation into Limiting Sprawl and Urban Growth Area & Annexation.

Urban Villages & Transit Corridors into Urban Villages and Transit Corridors.

Residential Development into Land Use Mix and remove redundancy with housing chapter.

Public and Institutional Development into Land Use Mix and remove redundancy with Capital Facilities chapter.

Commercial and Industrial Development into Land Use Mix and remove redundancy with Economic Development chapter.

Public Participation into New Civic Practices Chapter.

# Community Design

## What the Community Said

*These descriptions summarize the most common opinions we heard relevant to this chapter.*

* We appreciate and want more human-scale streetscapes throughout the community.
* Buildings should be designed with a variety of materials, colors, and textures.
* Incorporating design features such as porches, dormers, gables, or other details adds to the design of a building.
* The state now requires only “clear and objective” design standards; we hope design requirements won’t impact housing costs.
* We care about the outdoor and public realm, too. For example, we want private usable space, walkways, street trees and defined outdoor spaces.
* Let’s have buildings be pedestrian-oriented, with entrances visible from the street.
* When it comes to parking, let’s minimize its presence with alley access.

## Summary of Updates

We are proposing a variety of updates to our 2016 Comprehensive Plan. While the plan is divided into distinct chapters, there are updates that touch multiple chapters.

Here are the most significant updates related to Land Use. These themes span multiple chapters beyond this one.

* Inclusive and equitable planning
* Connected and resilient community
* Clear and predictable design standards
* Continued investment in Urban Village

## Community Design Chapter Draft Topics

* Community Identity and Sense of Place: Express the City’s distinct community identity and sense of place.
* Streets as Places: Promote human-scale streetscapes.
* Site and Building Design: Ensure sites and buildings are well-designed, pedestrian-friendly, and community-oriented.
* Historic and Cultural Resources: Preserve historic buildings, sites, landscapes, and cultural resources.
* Natural Features and Open Space: Integrate and elevate natural features and open space into design.

## Streets as Places

Existing

* Coordinated, complete, human-scale street and sidewalk design
* Street commercial uses
* Noise buffering from I-5

Update

* *Prioritizing streetscape design in certain areas; emphasis on design quality in underinvested areas: Prioritizing streetscape design in certain areas; emphasis on design quality in underinvested areas*

New

* Improvement, use and activation of alleys: Considering the need for alley improvements, activation, and access to minimize the visual presence of the car.
* Flexibility of street standards, design and right-of-way dedication: Also emphasizes design flexibility in Urban Villages and along transit corridors.

## Community Identity and Sense of Place

Existing

* Attractive, distinct, and livable districts and neighborhoods with thoughtful transitions of uses and scales between areas
* People-oriented public realm
* Emphasis on design of City Center, Urban Villages, and transit corridors
* Enhanced gateways/entrances to city
* Integration of public art

Update

* Connected, safe & accessible: Emphasizing safety and accessibility in the design of our community.

New

* Representative design: Design should reflect the diversity of people who live in the community. Identity will evolve as the community makeup evolves.

## Site and Building Design

Existing

* Minimize visual impacts of parking
* Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED)

Update

* Pedestrian-oriented development with priority design features: Consolidates various design requirements around pedestrian scale and orientation
* High-quality, attractive, varied, economically-feasible design: *Retain importance of design (even with HB 1293 requirements) while staying economically feasible*
* Flexibility for design, uses, and site-specific conditions: Expanded to emphasize flexibility for non-conforming buildings

New

* Clear and objective design: *HB 1110 (2023) Middle housing standards cannot be more restrictive than single family design standards; HB 1293 (2023) – Streamlines design review processes, requiring “clear and objective” standards.*

## Historic and Cultural Resources

Existing

* Incorporate historic features into civic projects

Update

* Coordinate a citywide preservation plan or approach: *Consolidates existing policies and includes a historic resource inventory, incentives, plus outreach approaches*
* Steward historic preservation prior to redevelopment: Emphasis on encouraging alternatives prior to redevelopment
* Retain historic district identities and promote context-sensitive design: Minor change to promote context-sensitive design of new buildings in proximity to historic buildings
* Benefits of historic preservation: Promotes many benefits and expands historic preservation to include more than just buildings
* Protect significant archaeological resources: Originally discussed in land use chapter and updated to emphasize resources that pre-date colonization

## Natural Features and Open Space

Existing

* Provide safe, public open spaces with amenities
* Enhance and define spaces with landscaping and screening
* Connect and link natural features
* Preserve trees and vegetation and control invasives
* Functional, flexible, and consolidated private open space
* Preserve scenic vistas
* Promote waterfront access

Update

* Prioritize native and climate-adaptive plants: *Adds climate-adaptive plants to existing policies*

## Shifts within the Community Design Chapter

Streets as Places into Streets as Places.

Community Image and Character into Community Identity and Sense of Place.

District and Neighborhood Identity into Community Identity and Sense of Place.

Site and Building Design into Site and Building Design and Capital Facilities Chapter and New Climate Chapter.

Urban Villages and Transit Corridors into Community Identity and Sense of Place and remove redundancy with Land Use and Transportation Chapters.

Infill Development and Renovations into Community Identity and Sense of Place and remove redundancy with Housing Chapter.

Historic Preservation into Historic and Cultural Resources.

Public Spaces and Open Space into Natural Features and Open Space.

# Housing

## What the Community Said

*These descriptions summarize the most common opinions we heard relevant to this chapter.*

* Every neighborhood needs to do its part to provide housing choices for everyone.
* We need more affordable housing, especially in mixed-income buildings.
* We need more 2-bedroom units and options for families. They should be located near jobs and amenities, even if they are small.
* Providing housing closer to jobs, transit, bicycle routes, and pedestrian paths is critical to tackle climate change.
* Co-living and communal housing types are interesting, especially for seniors and students.
* More housing types in every neighborhood are exciting, but fiveplexes, sixplexes, and stacked flats should only be allowed on busier streets.
* Existing housing density allowances seem inequitable or inconsistent. Aligning density with amenity access is preferred.

## Summary of Updates

We are proposing a variety of updates to our 2016 Comprehensive Plan. While the plan is divided into distinct chapters, there are updates that touch multiple chapters.

Here are the most significant updates related to Housing. These themes span multiple chapters beyond this one.

* Reduce barriers to build housing
* Energy efficiency and resiliency
* Housing along transit corridors
* More middle housing like triplexes or townhomes
* Mixed-income housing incentives
* Allowing small-scale businesses in all residential areas

## Housing Chapter Draft Topics

* Quantity of Housing: Ensure Bellingham has enough housing to accommodate projected growth.
* Types of Housing: Ensure Bellingham has a variety of housing types to meet community needs.
* Homeownership Opportunities: Encourage homeownership opportunities.
* Housing for All Incomes: Foster housing affordable to all incomes in all neighborhoods.
* Service-enriched Housing: Support service-enriched housing options across Bellingham.
* Safe, Healthy, and Livable Housing: Promote safe, healthy, and livable housing across Bellingham.

## Quantity of Housing

Existing

* Reduction of cost, timeline, and process where possible: *HB 1220 (2022) – Reduction of barriers to housing production; SB 5290 (2023) – Streamlining permit processes*

Update

* Smart and infill development: HB 1110 (2023); *Expansion of* [*Infill Toolkit*](https://cob.org/gov/dept/pcd/infill-housing-toolkit) *citywide (see Land Use chapter)*
* Minimum densities: Requiring some level of housing density for (re)development in important housing growth areas (see Land Use Chapter)

New

* Flexibility of ground level uses: Making it easier to develop housing in mixed-use areas
* Reduce barriers to viable construction types: SB 5491 (2023) – 6-story single-stair buildings; HB 2071 (2024) – 3-6 unit buildings; small unit types; *Also mass timber construction*

## Housing for All Incomes

[**The Consolidated Plan**](https://cob.org/services/planning/consolidated-plan) **identifies specific actions and priorities regarding affordable housing.**

**Existing**

* Federal and regional collaboration & funding

Update

* Affordable housing in all neighborhoods: *HB 1220 (2022) Growth distributed by income ban; Equitable distribution*
* Mixed-income projects and incentives: Strengthening existing programs and continuing monitoring economic feasibility of adjustments or new programs

New

* More affordable housing types: Modular construction, small lots, small units, co-living housing, etc
* Reduction of barriers to developing affordable housing
* Anti-displacement approaches: *HB 1220 (2022) Identification of areas at risk of their residents being displaced by economic pressures, strategies to address this including protection of naturally occurring affordable housing*

## Types of Housing

Existing

* Reduction of barriers to variety of housing types
* Special Needs housing, especially for seniors, families with children, and disabled

New

* Variety of types within all areas of the city: *HB 1110 (2023) – Allowing small lot, ADUs, cottages, multiplexes, common courtyards, and townhomes everywhere except Lake Whatcom Watershed*
* Communal/Co-living housing types: HB 1998 (2024); Also those designed for students
* Encouraging 2+ BR Units: Ensuring a future supply of larger units;
* See the Housing Preference Survey data

## Service-enriched Housing

Existing

* Regional collaboration

Update

* Shelter, interim, and permanent supportive housing options: Clearer definition of interim and permanent housing types

New

* Housing with on-site services: *HB 1220 (2022) Permanent Supportive Housing & others;* ***Note: Stand-alone services have been shifted to new Community Wellbeing chapter***
* Ensuring services scale with housing to meet needs: Ensuring service-enriched housing investments are well coordinated and scaled with availability of appropriate services
* Equitable distribution of projects
* Reduction of barriers to siting housing with on-site services

## Homeownership Opportunities

Existing

* Protection of manufactured home parks: Expanding tenant opportunity to purchase – SB 5198 (2023); Supporting displaced manufactured home park residents - HB 1771 (2023)

Update

* Small-scale housing (small lot, cottage, townhome, etc): *Encourage these types in more places – HB 1110 (2023) and allow lot splitting for them*

New

* Supporting shared equity options: *This allows owners to pay less overall because they are sharing some of the property, whether that be land (condos), public space (co-ops/co-housing), or both of the above (co-living housing)*
* Support for statewide condo-ization reform
* Supporting limited equity options: *This limits how much the owner owns, such as in a land trust (where a non-profit owns the land, but the resident owns the building)*
* Anti-displacement approaches: Support for rental communities transitioning to ownership models; Education and support for programs assisting homeowners to keep their homes

## Safe, Healthy, and Livable Housing

Existing

* Fair housing support

Update

* Clustering of housing to provide access to natural resources

New

* Ensuring safe and livable housing standards: *This relates to rental registration and its inspection process*
* Researching impact of livability code elements: *Both existing code and other considerations (usable space, open space, daylight access etc)*

## Shifts within the Housing Chapter

Quantity and Type of Housing into Quantity of Housing and Types of Housing.

Housing for All Incomes into Housing for All Incomes.

Special Needs Housing into Service-enriched Housing and New Community Wellbeing Chapter (stand-alone services).

Manufactured Home Parks into Homeownership Opportunities.

Sense of Place into Safe, Healthy, and Livable Housing and New Community Wellbeing Chapter (placemaking).

# Transportation

## What the Community Said

*These descriptions summarize the most common opinions we heard relevant to this chapter.*

* Transit is not a convenient option for me. It makes more sense to drive instead of waiting for the bus. Please increase the frequency of transit!
* I would love a dedicated parking spot on my property, but I still support initiatives to reduce parking requirements.
* We want to see more trails near where we live so we can get to work and school safely and comfortably by bike!
* We need safe pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure!
* Please keep seniors in mind when planning for transit and parking. Accessibility is important!
* Future high-speed rail is exciting! I would love to be able to take a train to Portland, but we need to make sure we proactively plan for the changes.
* Our arterials get really busy during rush hour. How can we fix it?

## Summary of Updates

We are proposing a variety of updates to our 2016 Comprehensive Plan. While the plan is divided into distinct chapters, there are updates that touch multiple chapters.

Here are the most significant updates related to multimodal transportation. These themes span multiple chapters beyond this one.

* Housing along transit corridors
* Network of urban nodes connected by transit corridors
* A future community process for planning transit corridors
* More transportation connections to provide choices and limit congestion
* Adjusting what areas the city could grow into and planning long-term infrastructure needs.

## Transportation Chapter Draft Topics

Multimodal Network to Promote Mode Shift: Provide a multi-modal transportation network that promotes a community-wide mode-shift.

Connectivity: A network that connects people to opportunity, social networks, and services.

Safety, Comfort, and Reliability: A transportation system that prioritizes safety, comfort, and reliability for all users.

Transit: Build and strengthen collaboration and information sharing with transit agencies.

Equitable Facilities and Infrastructure: Needs of diverse and vulnerable populations are addressed in transportation projects and facilities are accessible for all users.

## Multimodal Network to Promote Mode Shift

Existing

* Incorporate Bike & Ped Plans
* Transportation Demand Management & Transportation System Management
* Track patterns
* Commute Trip Reduction & Smart Trips
* UV Transportation Impact Fee Reduction Program

Update

* Micromobility: *Policy for potential bike or scooter share in the future*

## Connectivity

Existing

* Choices and opportunities

Update

* Connect and construct missing transportation links
* Network connection, efficiency, interconnected system
* Complete Streets on State Routes

New

* Enhancing transitional zones between streets and trails
* Trails as transportation

## Safety, Comfort, & Reliability

Update

* Proactive preservation and maintenance of infrastructure
* Wayfinding, route finding, and branding
* Low stress bike & ped facilities

New

* Reduce collisions, incidents, fatalities, and serious injuries: *Policies related to the Vision Zero Concept*
* Safe Systems Approach: *Policies related to the Vision Zero Concept*
* Reduced and enforced vehicle speeds through traffic calming measures: *Especially in School Zones*

## Transit

Update

* Transit-oriented development (TOD) along frequent transit lines: *Making these two policies a primary component of the Bellingham Plan (see Land Use Chapter)*
* Prioritize transit: *Making these two policies a primary component of the Bellingham Plan (see Land Use Chapter)*
* Consistent City & transit agency policies: Ensuring City and transit agency policies support the same goals and objectives
* Regional collaboration

New

* Increased investment: Exploring options to support transit

## Equitable Facilities and Infrastructure

Existing

* Equity in public engagement, service, delivery and capital investment
* Multiple languages (signage & notices)
* Human needs in street standards
* Measure, forecast, and mitigate impacts on peds, bikes, and transit
* Transportation Modal Hierarchy

Update

* Sidewalks and street frontage: *Policy for when and where sidewalks/improvements are required*
* Safe Routes to School and access management

New

* Balanced investment: *Ensuring equitable investment in transportation projects across the city*

## Shifts within the Transportation Chapter

Infrastructure for Bikes, Peds, and Non-SOVs into Multimodal network to promote mode shift.

Safe, Connected, and Sustainable Options into Multimodal network to promote mode shift, Connectivity, and Safety, Comfort, and Reliability.

Limiting Urban Sprawl into Land Use chapter.

Reduce Dependence on SOVs into Transit.

Maintain and Improve Infrastructure into Equitable facilities and infrastructure.

Social Equity Needs into Connectivity and Equitable facilities and Infrastructure.

# Economic Development

## What the Community Said

*These descriptions summarize the most common opinions we heard relevant to this chapter.*

* We want our neighborhoods to be more walkable, bikeable, “transit”able and “park”able with connections to the outdoors and activities. We also want to be close to services and jobs!
* We need more living wage jobs! Wages have not kept up with housing prices.
* Future high-speed rail is an opportunity for better connectivity throughout the region.
* We need to make sure there is enough industrial land to protect jobs.
* Remote work and other post-pandemic trends are not applicable to everyone, and people have all come out of it in different ways that make sense for them.
* We should reduce barriers to allow community activity centers and cultural institutions in urban villages.
* We need to diversify our economy and economic sectors.

## Summary of Updates

We are proposing a variety of updates to our 2016 Comprehensive Plan. While the plan is divided into distinct chapters, there are updates that touch multiple chapters.

Here are the most significant updates related to Economic Development. These themes span multiple chapters beyond this one.

* Preparing for a future analysis of Bellingham’s employment and our regional role
* A network of urban nodes connected by transit corridors
* Continuing investment in existing Urban Villages
* Allowing small-scale businesses in all residential areas
* Adjusting what areas the city could grow into and planning long-term infrastructure needs.

## Economic Development Draft Topics

* Regional Collaboration and Coordination: Coordinate and collaborate with partner organizations to promote living wage jobs.
* Business-friendly Culture: Build and maintain a positive and competitive business-friendly culture in the public and private sectors.
* Workforce Support: Encourage programs and priorities that support and sustain the Bellingham workforce.
* Employment Lands and Supporting Infrastructure: Ensure sufficient employment lands and supporting infrastructure for a diverse mix of employment opportunities.

## Regional Collaboration and Coordination

Existing

* Aid associations to promote economic development and tourism
* Maintain and build relations with the County, Port, and other cities
* Support business start-up efforts
* Support the Port’s efforts for Bellingham International Airport

Update

* Coordinate and share resources with regional partners: Partners include economic development organizations as well as major employers and educational institutions

New

* Future employment study: *Learning more about our future employment priorities, needs, and opportunities; regional study*
* Cascadia Corridor: Recognizing our place and role in the greater region

## Business Friendly Culture

Existing

* Review regulations, standards, and guidelines
* Review economic impacts of proposed legislation
* Incentives to promote economic development activity and sustainable business practices
* Review and evaluate permit processes
* Support access to working capital for entrepreneurship
* Support local employers

Update

* Community safety
* Support programs that connect education to industry

## Workforce Support

Existing

* Support efforts to train workers
* Expanded transportation options
* City internships and job opportunities

Update

* Childcare: *Recognizing childcare as an economic development priority*
* Housing for the workforce: *Recognizing the disparity between wages and housing costs*

## Employment Lands and Supporting Infrastructure

Existing

* Assess and manage supply of employment lands
* Reserve industrial zoning
* Evaluate rezones for employment impacts
* Adequate infrastructure
* Coordinating environmental remediation
* Remove barriers for redevelopment
* Urban Villages, especially the City Center, as employment centers

## Shifts within the Economic Development Chapter

Business-Friendly Climate into Regional Collaboration and Coordination and Business-Friendly Culture.

Accommodate a Mix of Employment and Living Wage Jobs into Regional Collaboration and Coordination.

Employment lands and supporting infrastructure into Employment Lands and Supporting Infrastructure.

Foster Vibrant Urban Villages into Employment Lands and Supporting Infrastructure and Land Use Chapter.

High Quality of Life into Workforce Support and new Community Wellbeing Chapter.

# Environment

## What the Community Said

*These descriptions summarize the most common opinions we heard relevant to this chapter.*

* Most of us feel that a “healthy natural environment” is a major strength of Bellingham and we want it to stay that way.
* In 20 years we want to see our city be healthy, clean, green, and sustainable.
* Bellingham is outdoorsy and environmentally-minded!
* The environment, recreation, and public open spaces are some of our most important community assets.
* We care about trees, nature, and greenery, and these need to be balanced with growth and increased density.

## Summary of Updates

We are proposing a variety of updates to our 2016 Comprehensive Plan. While the plan is divided into distinct chapters, there are updates that touch multiple chapters.

Here are the most significant updates related to Environment. These themes span multiple chapters beyond this one.

* Streamlining the chapter
* Inclusive and equitable planning
* Connected and resilient community
* Introducing a new climate chapter

## Environment Chapter Draft Topics

Aquatic Ecosystems: Protect and improve the health of terrestrial ecosystems.

Terrestrial Ecosystems: Protect and improve the health of terrestrial ecosystems.

Natural Resource Management: Protect and improve natural systems and ensure environmental sustainability through coordinated natural resource management.

Human Health and Environment: Recognize the interconnectedness of human health and the environment; provide a safe and healthful environment for people.

## Aquatic Ecosystems

Existing

* Protect and restore aquatic habitats and corridors

Update

* Protect and restore water quality and quantity: *Address hydrologic processes for water quantity; address water quality, especially in waterbodies with listed water quality impairments*
* Lake Whatcom Management Program: *Streamlines policies related to Lake Whatcom to not reiterate what is covered in the management program*

New

* Storm and Surface Water Comprehensive Plan: *To prevent water quality degradation and improve conditions in receiving waters impacted by development*

## Terrestrial Ecosystems

Existing

* Protect and restore water quality and quantity

Update

* Identify and protect open space corridors: Per RCW 36.70A.172, also gives emphasis to anadromous fisheries
* Comprehensive Urban Forest Plan: Speaks to vision and purpose of the Urban Forest Plan without reiterating the specific goals, strategies, and actions within it

New

* Maintain and restore geologic processes: *Protects bluffs, landslides, seeps, and erosion hazards for their ecological function*

## Natural Resource Management

Existing

* Adopt and utilize best available science
* Reduce impacts from unprogrammed uses
* Natural resource assessments, plans, and regulations

Update

* Collaboration with partner agencies, non-profits, and tribes: *Add tribes to the list of collaborators*

New

* Balance natural resources with development: Speaks to importance of balancing competing interests – such as housing and trees
* Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan: Existing document to be emphasized in the plan; protects people and environment from natural hazards
* Promote native plants and control invasives: To promote ecological functions, restoration of natural systems
* Public awareness and stewardship: Existing practice to be emphasized in the plan

## Human Health and Environment

Existing

* Outdoor air quality
* Safe disposal of hazardous and other waste
* Cleanup of contaminated sites (remediation)
* Discourage herbicides, pesticides, and toxic chemical use

Update

* Environmental equity: *Equitably distribute environmental benefits, minimize environmental burdens, and help people connect to nature*
* Promote urban tree canopy: *Consider the environmental, economic, and social value of trees; encourage tree preservation and planting*

## Shifts within the Environment Chapter

Drinking Water into Capital Facilities Chapter.

Limit Lake Whatcom Development into Aquatic Ecosystems.

Ecological Functions and Habitats into Natural Resource Management.

Limit Urban Sprawl and Promote Sustainable Land Use into Land Use Chapter.

Lakes, Streams, and Salish Sea Health spread across most topics.

Urban Forest Spread across most topics.

Air Quality into Human Health and Environment and reducing redundancies with New Climate Chapter, Transportation and Land Use Chapters.

Climate Change into New Climate Chapter and Transportation and Land Use Chapters.

Interdependence of Environmental, Economic, and Social Interests into Human Health and Environment and new climate chapter and capital facilities chapter.

# Parks, Recreation and Open Space

NOTE: The following slides are for informational purposes only. We are not taking any feedback on the Parks Chapter because it is not currently being updated with the Bellingham Plan.

This chapter’s next update is due in 2026, with public engagement starting in 2025. Stay tuned for future engagement opportunities!

## What the Community Said

*These descriptions summarize the most common opinions we heard relevant to this chapter.*

* Most of us feel that recreational opportunities, a healthy natural environment, and public open spaces are the top three strengths of Bellingham.
* There are all kinds of ways that we like to use public recreation spaces and facilities.
* Public parks, recreation opportunities, and open spaces are some of the most important community assets.
* We have lots of ideas for how to make our parks, trails, and recreation facilities more accessible and inclusive.
* There are all kinds of ways that we like to use public recreation spaces and facilities.

## Existing 2020 PRO Plan

**The City has an existing** [**Parks, Recreation & Open Space Plan (PRO Plan),**](https://cob.org/wp-content/uploads/2020-pro-plan.pdf) **which is part of the City’s comprehensive plan, but is updated on a different timeline.**

This document guides the preservation and expansion of the park, recreation, and open space system as the community grows.

The PRO Plan is updated every six years, separately from the comprehensive plan. The last complete update of the PRO Plan was in 2020.

The next update is due in 2026, with public engagement in 2025.

*After the parks chapter is updated with goals and policies, it will be incorporated into the Bellingham Plan. The more technical/detailed PRO plan will also be adopted by reference.*

## 2020 PRO Plan: Existing Goals

The PRO Plan is organized around eight existing goals with related “objectives.” These concepts will be revised during the 2026 PRO Plan update.

* Equity and Inclusion: Provide high-quality facilities and services that are accessible, inclusive and distributed equitably across Bellingham.
* Enhance and Expand: Enhance the capacity, quality and variety of use of the existing park and recreation system.
* Health Wellness and Community: Create environments that encourage regular active and passive recreation activities to support health, sense of safety, wellness and social connections.
* Integrate Nature: Preserve and integrate nature, natural systems and ecological principles throughout the park system.
* Innovate: Develop innovative programs, services and strategies for expanding recreational opportunities and improving accessibility.
* Connect: Connect and unify the community with trail and greenway corridors.
* Effective Operations: Manage park land and programs effectively, efficiently and sustainably utilizing quantitative and qualitative measures.
* Recreational Assessment: In 2020, conduct a Community Recreation Needs Assessment

# Capital Facilities and Urban Services

## What the Community Said

*These descriptions summarize the most common opinions we heard relevant to this chapter.*

* We need to plan sustainably, with efficient use of facilities and avoiding sprawl.
* We want to make sure the City coordinates with the school districts as we grow.
* We love the programs the Library and Museum put together! We want more ways to connect with the community.
* I’m not sure which facilities and utilities are run by the City, other Public entities, or private companies. How do we learn more?
* It is confusing when you move to or within Bellingham to figure out what you need to sign up for – we would love more guidance.
* Public buildings and events need to be more accessible and welcoming.

## Summary of Updates

We are proposing a variety of updates to our 2016 Comprehensive Plan. While the plan is divided into distinct chapters, there are updates that touch multiple chapters.

Here are the most significant updates related to Capital Facilities. These themes span multiple chapters beyond this one.

* Inclusive and equitable facilities and services
* Energy efficiency and resiliency
* Planning long-term infrastructure needs

## Capital Facilities and Urban Services Chapter Draft Topics

* Reliable Facilities & Services: Deliver an equitable, cost-effective, and reliable network aligned with the growth strategy.
* Sustainable Funding: Proactively plan and fund the network to support growth.
* Equitable Siting & Maintenance: Equitably site, improve, and maintain public and private facilities.
* City Buildings & Equipment: Plan for the future needs of the City’s buildings and equipment.
* City Utilities & Infrastructure: Implement a network of reliable City utilities and infrastructure.
* Private Utilities: Implement a network of reliable City utilities and infrastructure.
* Private Utilities: Support a network of private utilities and emergency systems.
* Other Public Facilities & Infrastructure: Support other public facilities and infrastructure.

## Reliable Facilities & Services

Existing

* Ensuring levels of service and other community needs are met: *Quantitative levels of service will be defined elsewhere in the relevant action plan for each topic*

## Sustainable Funding

Existing

* Planned facilities ready by development opening
* Concurrency/Development paying its share (impact and development fees)

Update

* Fiscal sustainability: Proactively and regularly planning land use and growth alongside needed public facilities and services
* Planning in the UGA and for annexation: *Ensuring long-term funding strategies for areas in the UGA (Urban Growth Area, the area into which the city can grow)*

## Equitable Siting & Maintenance

Existing

* Balancing benefit/need and potential adverse impacts
* Buffering/ undergrounding of facilities
* Construction/ maintenance management

Update

* Equitable siting & maintenance: *Equitable investment will be layered on top of existing coordination, joint use, and utility siting policies*

## City Buildings & Equipment

Existing

* Priorities (public health, accessibility, efficiency, environmental quality)
* Efficient use of energy, water, materials (reuse) in City buildings: Clearer definition and separation of City building efficiency and community efficiency (next goal)

Update

* Planning for maintenance and new buildings: *Maintenance prioritized; new planning for areas of growth; Consolidated set of services and administration in the City Center*
* Public buildings (some) as essential gathering and emergency response spaces: Adjusted from libraries to broader City buildings; consideration for additional emergency response use (such as cooling shelters)
* Sharing of facilities and resources: Separate policies for law enforcement and fire vs other City buildings
* Public buildings as models: Expanded beyond sustainable design to include innovative approaches and best practices

## City Utilities & Infrastructure

Existing

* Drinking water quality and quantity: *Includes need for fire protection water storage*
* Coordination of water, waste water, and stormwater infrastructure
* Efficiency of community water use and resources: *Clearer definition and separation of City building efficiency (previous goal) and community efficiency*

Update

* Regional analysis for stormwater, flooding, drainage: *Focus on regional collaboration to coordinate standards; site-specific requirements and low impact development (LID) addressed in Environment chapter*

## Private Utilities

Existing

* Public-private coordination
* Support for conservation and recycling programs
* Telecommunication (including wireless) network
* Installation and management safety

## Other Public Facilities & Infrastructure

Existing

* Support for and coordination of school siting and impact fees

Update

* County, state, and transit authority coordination: *Addition/emphasis of transit authority*
* Coordination with school districts and universities regarding growth: *Addition of university/institutional planning coordination*
* Collaborating with public partners to utilize facilities for community gathering

## Shifts within the Capital Facilities Chapter

Accountable Facilities & Services into Reliable Facilities & Services.

Fire & Police, Libraries, and Museum redistributed between proposed topics.

Water, Sewer, & Stormwater into City Utilities and Infrastructure and removing redundancy with Environment Chapter.

Utilities into City Utilities and Infrastructure and Private Utilities.

Public Schools into Other Public Facilities & Infrastructure.

**Note: This chapter also includes a capital facilities inventory and capital improvement plan (from the budget). This current date (that changes over time) into new Companion Document.**

## Proposed Topic Grouping

*The first three topics (Reliable Facilities & Services, Equitable Siting & Maintenance, Sustainable Funding) apply to all facilities while the remaining (City Buildings & Equipment, City Utilities & Infrastructure, Private Utilities, Other Public Facilities & Infrastructure) describe unique needs for each type.*

# Climate (new chapter)

## Why are we proposing this new chapter?

State Requirements: We must meet legislative requirement to address climate mitigation and resilience.

Community feedback: We heard how important climate issues are to the community.

Significance: This topic is important and should be consolidated so relevant information is easier to find.

## Where are we in the process of developing this chapter?

Collecting feedback: This chapter summary is higher level than others. Because this is a new chapter, we want to get feedback from the community and community partners before developing it too far.

Integrating feedback: Next, we will integrate feedback as we develop the new chapter.

## How can you help shape this chapter?

Provide feedback: This is new and we are sharing our ideas now to ensure there’s time to collect and integrate your feedback. Let us know what’s missing and what you’d like to see in this chapter.

Review the final draft: We will have a final draft chapter later, which you are also invited to provide feedback on.

## Existing Action Plan

The City also has a [Climate Protection Action Plan,](https://cob.org/services/environment/climate/program) which includes both an inventory of current emissions and dozens of specific measures to reduce these emissions.

This document focuses on monitoring and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. It addresses both the City’s emissions as an organization and the community’s emissions overall.

(originally adopted in 2007 and amended in 2018)

The Comprehensive Plan (soon to be renamed “The Bellingham Plan”) guides this type of document with high level policies. This action plan is adopted by reference within the Comprehensive Plan and is more detailed.

## What the Community Said

*These descriptions summarize the most common opinions we heard relevant to this chapter.*

* Combatting climate change is critical. It should be integrated into our growth choices.
* I’m not sure what we can or should be doing about rising sea levels, wildfires, and other changing conditions.
* I want to make sure my children can enjoy the same natural elements I have been able to.
* We want more places to cool off in the hotter summers.
* Transportation, housing, and land use are intertwined with climate. We need to consider them as a whole.
* I am worried about the housing cost implications of climate approaches.

## Summary of Updates

We are proposing a variety of updates to our 2016 Comprehensive Plan. While the plan is divided into distinct chapters, there are updates that touch multiple chapters.

Here are the most significant updates related to Climate. These themes span multiple chapters beyond this one.

* Fostering a connected and resilient community
* Inclusive and equitable citywide planning
* Collaborative “One City” approach
* Linking and integrating climate with other plan topics

## Climate: What exists today?

**While the Climate chapter is new as an individual chapter, the 2016 Comprehensive Plan references climate mitigation in most chapters, either directly or indirectly. Here are some of the main ways.**

In the Land Use Chapter

* **Smart and sustainable development patterns**

In the Transportation Chapter

* **Transportation-related emissions reductions**

In the Environment Chapter

* **Countywide natural hazard mitigation planning**
* **Carbon sequestration in nature (trees)**
* **Planning for climate impacts on water supply**
* **Partnerships to address climate change**

In the Housing, Community Design, Capital Facilities Chapters

* **Low-impact development techniques**
* **Renewable energy sources**
* **Energy efficiency measures (public and private)**

## Climate Chapter: Proposed Topic Areas

We are proposing taking those climate topics already in the 2016 plan today, adding new climate topics, and further emphasizing others to form the new Climate chapter for the 2025 plan.

Existing Concept from 2016 Plan: *These areas relate to mitigating emissions. These policies will mostly be pulled from existing chapters.*

* Mitigate Transportation Emissions
* Use and Generate Renewable Energy
* Mitigate Building Emissions

New Concept/ Major Updates: *These topics emphasize collaboration and equity as key components of our climate approach. They also speak to the impacts of climate change. While the plan alludes to some of these topics, most of these concepts are new or expanded topics for the plan.*

* “One City” Collaborative Approach
* Prepare for Extreme Weather
* Sustainable, Resilient Resources
* Justice & Equity Climate Work
* Prepare for Wildfire Impacts
* Protect Ecosystems
* Prepare for Sea Level Rise

Here again are the topics we are proposing including in the new Climate chapter. On this page, they are grouped so you can see them by type of climate work and associated state requirements.

**General: *HB 1181 (2023): Crosscutting, general climate approach***

* **“One City” Collaborative Approach**
* **Justice & Equity Climate Work**

Resilience/Adaptation: *HB 1181 (2023): Address climate resiliency/adaptation*

* **Prepare for Extreme Weather**
* **Prepare for Sea Level Rise**
* **Prepare for Wildfire Impacts**
* **Protect Ecosystems**
* **Sustainable, Resilient Resources**

Mitigation: *HB 1181 (2023): Mitigating emissions; Linked to existing actions outlined in the Climate Protection Action Plan*

* **Mitigate Transportation Emissions**
* **Use and Generate Renewable Energy**
* **Mitigate Building Emissions**

# Community Wellbeing (new chapter)

## Why are we proposing this new chapter?

**Community** **feedback:** We heard how important the wellbeing of the community is in many different ways.

**Significance:** This topic is important and should be consolidated so relevant information is easier to find.

## Where are we in the process of developing this chapter?

**Collecting feedback:** This chapter summary is higher level than others. Because this is a new chapter, we want to get feedback from the community and community partners before developing it too far.

**Integrating feedback:** Next, we will integrate feedback as we develop the new chapter.

## How can you help shape this chapter?

**Provide feedback:** This is new and we are sharing our ideas now to ensure there’s time to collect and integrate your feedback. Let us know what’s missing and what you’d like to see in this chapter.

**Review the final draft:** We will have afinal draft chapter later, which you are also invited to provide feedback on.

## What the Community Said

*These descriptions summarize the most common opinions we heard relevant to this chapter.*

* **I want to gather with my friends in a place that feels authentic to my culture.**
* **We want to foster safe, vibrant, and unique places, especially in our City Center.**
* **Multi-generational relationships are important, especially when considering ways to combat loneliness.**
* **We like learning new things in welcoming spaces.**
* **A connected community is a stronger, more resilient one. We want more ways to connect with each other.**
* **We want to reduce food deserts and provide more access to basic essentials and services.**

## Summary of Updates

We are proposing a variety of updates to our 2016 Comprehensive Plan. While the plan is divided into distinct chapters, there are updates that touch multiple chapters.

Here are the most significant updates related to Community Wellbeing. These themes span multiple chapters beyond this one.

* Fostering a connected and resilient community
* Inclusive and equitable planning
* Integrating City work in an efficient and responsive “One City” approach

## What exists in the 2016 Comprehensive Plan?

**While the Community Wellbeing chapter is new as an individual chapter, 2016 Comprehensive Plan chapters reference the wellbeing of the community in these main ways:**

In the Land Use Chapter

* **Healthcare (physical access)**
* **Arts & Culture**
* **Healthy Lifestyles**
* **Human Services**
* **Food Access, Systems**
* **Childcare**
* **Community Connectedness**

In the Parks, Recreation & Open Space Chapter

* **Active Living**

In the Transportation Chapter

* **Active Transportation Types**

In the Economic Development Chapter

* **Skill Training**
* **Healthcare (physical access)**
* **Community Safety**
* **Food Access/Systems**

In the Capital Facilities & Utilities Chapter

* **Arts & Culture**
* **Life-Long Learning**

## What concepts might be included in the 2025 plan?

In addition to concepts from the 2016 plan, we heard feedback from the community related to community wellbeing that we are exploring adding to or emphasizing more in the 2025 plan. Together, we are proposing that these form the new chapter.

**Additional concepts we are exploring adding to this new chapter:**

* **Child and Family Wellbeing**
* **Economic Opportunities**
* **Personal Enrichment**
* **Behavioral Health**
* **Educational Opportunities**
* **Addressing Homelessness**
* **Community Resiliency**

## Existing Resources and Plans

**The City also has several resources and plans related to this chapter, including**

**a Consolidated Plan with specific actions to support affordable housing and human services.**

Our [Consolidated Plan](https://cob.org/services/planning/consolidated-plan), which outlines the priorities for spending federal Housing and Urban Development (HUD) grant funds, includes specific actions and priorities to support affordable housing and community needs.

The Comprehensive Plan (soon to be renamed “The Bellingham Plan”) guides this type of document with high level policies. This action plan is much more detailed and more frequently updated.

# Equitable and Inclusive Civic Practices (new chapter)

## Why are we proposing this new chapter?

**Community feedback:** We heard how important equitable and inclusive civic practices are to the community.

**Significance:** This topic is important and should be consolidated so relevant information is easier to find.

## Where are we in the process of developing this chapter?

**Collecting feedback:** This chapter summary is higher level than others. Because this is a new chapter, we want to get feedback from the community and community partners before developing it too far.

**Integrating feedback:** Next, we will integrate feedback as we develop the new chapter.

## How can you help shape this chapter?

**Provide feedback:** This is new and we are sharing our ideas now to ensure there’s time to collect and integrate your feedback. Let us know what’s missing and what you’d like to see in this chapter.

**Review the final draft:** We will have afinal draft chapter later, which you are also invited to provide feedback on.

## What the Community Said

*These descriptions summarize the most common opinions we heard relevant to this chapter.*

* **Everyone should have a voice, and we should put extra effort into reaching those who aren’t represented yet.**
* **Community engagement is important. It is a part of what makes us Bellingham.**
* **Equity is important. We want our choices today to benefit everyone in the future.**
* **I wish it was easier to understand how everything the City is working on relates.**
* **We want civic services and processes for all of our neighbors, including the local Tribes.**
* **The best decisions come from listening to many viewpoints and choosing directions that benefit everyone.**
* **We like to know what the City is working on and how our ideas might be incorporated.**

## Summary of Updates

We are proposing a variety of updates to our 2016 Comprehensive Plan. While the plan is divided into distinct chapters, there are updates that touch multiple chapters.

Here are the most significant updates related to Civic Practices. These themes span multiple chapters beyond this one.

* Better public accessibility of the plan itself
* Inclusive and equitable citywide planning
* Collaborative “One City” approach

## What exists in the 2016 Comprehensive Plan?

In the Land Use Chapter

* **Public participation in planning**
* **Reaching out to underserved populations**
* **Culture of dialogue & partnerships**
* **Transparent Processes**

In the Housing Chapter

* **Equitable and inclusive community involvement in planning**

In the Transportation Chapter

* **Equitable public engagement**
* **Equitable investments**
* **Accessible facilities**

In the Economic Development Chapter

* **Collaboration with County, Port, and regional partners**

In the Capital Facilities and Utilities Chapter

* **Public participation in planning facilities and improvements**

In the Parks, Recreation & Open Space Chapter

* **Park improvements & service partnerships for underserved areas**
* **Diversity, equity, and inclusion training for staff**
* **Public participation in Parks planning**

## Equitable and Inclusive Civic Practices Chapter: Proposed Topic Areas

**In addition to concepts from the 2016 plan, we heard feedback from the community related to equitable and inclusive civic practices that we will add to or emphasize more in the 2025 plan. Topics from the 2016 plan along with the new ones can be represented in the following proposed topic areas.**

**Proposed New Chapter Topic Areas**

* Accessible and Equitable Services and Processes
* Outreach and Engagement
* Government to Government & Tribal Relations

Some Updates: *These areas will include minor updates to existing policies. The main changes will be in how they are gathered and emphasized in their importance.* *HB 1220 (2021) requires the City to identify and address policies with racially disparate or exclusionary impacts.*

* Accessible and Equitable Services and Processes
* Outreach and Engagement

New Concept: *This area is mostly new to the plan and reflects a stronger emphasis on collaboration with local Tribes.* HB 1717 (2022) and relevant RCW define specific requirements related to Tribal outreach and participation.

* Government to Government & Tribal Relations