



2025 State Legislative Agenda

City of Bellingham

Actively Pursue

Support Bellingham Bay MTCA cleanup grants

Request: \$3M | Cost: \$28.6M (RG Haley only)

The City urges support of the RG Haley Remedial Action Grant. The City and Port of Bellingham are jointly undertaking RG Haley and Cornwall Landfill cleanups, which are legacies of industrial contamination on Bellingham's waterfront. When cleaned up, the RG Haley site – combined with the Cornwall Avenue Landfill site – will become Salish Landing Park, almost 20 acres of new waterfront public access. This shovel-ready effort is fully permitted and scheduled to begin in early 2025. MTCA funding is critical for project completion. The City has allocated \$16 million in local funds for this work and was awarded a Public Works Board loan of \$7.3 million for the landfill portion of the project.

Fund critical court facilities

Request: \$1M | Cost: \$ 3M-5M (est.)

Since 2000, the Bellingham Municipal Court has been housed in a former church originally constructed in 1972. It has never been optimal for court operations, does not have critical safety features, has been classified as a failing asset, and lacks the structural quality to legitimize further investment. It also lacks adequate space to support therapeutic court needs, house diversion partners or allow for delivery of trauma-informed court and related services. The City has budgeted local REET dollars to evaluate and design potential renovations of our former federal courthouse downtown to house the court and expanded therapeutic services. Pursuing this concept would leverage an existing historic resource, affordably address court needs, and reinvigorate an anchor building downtown.

Fund active infrastructure needs

As our community grows, the need for “third places” – places for people beyond home and work – grow as well. They are important for connection and community building. We aim to create these spaces for different ages and diverse populations.

Central Library renovations – Request: \$1M | Cost: \$12M

Bellingham treasures its library, with per capita library use among the highest in the state. Renovation plans needing funding include expanded children's areas – last renovated in 1985 – and additional teen and meeting room spaces.

Skate Park – Request: \$1M | Cost: \$3.5M (est.)

Bellingham has an active skating community and the City has identified additional skate park facilities as a priority. An active and growing community group is committed to creating a world-class, competition-grade skate park in collaboration with the City. This is a unique opportunity to locate a new skate park for year-round use under a bridge near the City's waterfront, at the site of a current DIY park, activating an otherwise underutilized space adjacent to a major waterfront redevelopment and our downtown. The City has budgeted local REET dollars to design the first phase of the park.

2026 World Cup needs

Located between Seattle and Vancouver BC, Bellingham is uniquely positioned to benefit from – and experience impacts from – 2026 World Cup games in both cities and related activities throughout the region. Funding and actions necessary to support safe and vibrant 2026 World Cup activities in our area are currently being identified.

Access to housing for all

The City supports as a top priority a range of legislative actions to reduce barriers and enable local efforts to create more – and more affordable – housing choices. In the last five years, the median rent in Bellingham has increased by 37 percent, and the median home price increased by 56 percent, leaving more than half of renters and a quarter of homeowners as cost burdened. We have a critical shortage of housing; we have yet to catch up from the deficit of housing that resulted from the 2008-2012 economic recession and we are not adding enough today. Bellingham needs more housing overall, and more options in reach for everyone. During the 2025 session, City leaders will advocate for many measures that support access to housing for all.

Address vacant buildings and properties

In the heart of Bellingham's downtown, a former JC Penney building has sat vacant for more than 35 years – longer than it was open for business. Despite efforts by City leaders to work with the property owner, this building remains vacant. This exemplifies the lack of tools cities have to remedy vacant buildings and properties. The City supports as a top priority funding and local authority to address vacant buildings and properties, which in Bellingham are barriers to downtown revitalization and can be magnets for public health and safety issues citywide. Legislative actions could include policy and funding options such as "vacancy taxes" or similar tools and options to address illegal dumping and resolve encampments on vacant properties.

Actively Support

Fiscal sustainability and local options

Local government revenues are not keeping pace with the rising costs of delivering services, and existing revenue options available to cities unfairly penalize lower income community members. The City supports protecting MTCA funds and enacting progressive revenue options, including:

Preserving Model Toxics Control Act Funds: Preserve this dedicated funding source regardless of state funding shortfalls.

Property tax reform: Provide a local option to adjust local property tax to maintain basic services, limit not to exceed 3%.

Expand REET: Provide a local option Graduated Real Estate Excise Tax.

Relief from state mandates, especially those with fiscal implications.

Transportation and other infrastructure needs

The City supports investments in transportation and other vital infrastructure needs for our growing community. Key among our many needs include:

Transportation benefit district reform: Eliminate restrictions and time limits for voter-approved Transportation Benefit Districts, allow City Councils to authorize up to the full .3% sales tax.

Bridge repair, fish passages: Support timely infrastructure repair and replacement, especially for bridges, given the critical need for transportation and emergency vehicle access, as well as fish passage needs.

State route repairs: Fund badly-needed pavement preservation and maintenance of SR 539 (Guide Meridian) between I-5 and Horton Road as part of fully funding the I-5/SR 539 Fish Passage project for Baker and Spring Creeks.

Food security and affordable childcare

The City supports investments and policy options to address Bellingham's urgent needs for food security and increased access to affordable childcare.

Monitor

Other legislative activities

While this agenda represents key City priorities for the 2025 session, it is not comprehensive and is a living document. The City and its contract lobbying team are monitoring other activities and will support or oppose other emerging legislative priorities during the session.

Partner legislative priorities

The City values its local partners in public service, advocacy organizations representing specific service areas, and our tribal government neighbors. We support their priorities where needs and interests align.